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THE MESSAGE OF JESUS

By
B. HARVIE BRANSCOMB

AN ABINGDON-COKESBURY GOOD BOOK

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS

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A Survey of the Teaching of Jesus Contained in the Synoptic Gospels

By

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO

MY FATHER

WHO HAS BEEN PREACHING THE MESSAGE OF JESUS
FOR MORE THAN FORTY YEARS

PREFACE

THIS small volume has been written to serve as one of a series of textbooks for use by adult classes and study groups. This fact has determined to a considerable extent the form and content of the book. The plan of the series calls for another volume on the Fourth Gospel, and this study has been confined therefore to the material in the first three Gospels. Nor could such a textbook be exhaustive even upon that part of the field, and there are many phases of the teaching of Jesus which the author has consciously, though regretfully, omitted.

The quotations from the Old Testament and the New Testament have been taken from the English Revised Version except where otherwise noted.

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CHAPTER I

THE RECORDS OF HIS TEACHING AND THE WAY JESUS TAUGHT

I

It was practically two thousand years ago that Jesus taught. At that time even the "old countries" of northern Europe were still primeval forests and the only people found there were barbaric tribes who looked out on seas that were to them the limits of the world. South of the long barrier of the Alps and the Danube, on the warm peninsulas jutting into the Mediterranean Sea, were the ancient civilizations which we call Greece and Rome. In Jesus' day the former of these had disappeared as a political entity but continued as a powerful cultural force. Its art was the pattern of the civilized world, its literature was read by all who sought to be educated, its language had become the medium of universal intercourse. In the world of affairs Rome ruled supreme. Her soldiers trod the roads from Parthia to Spain, her courts administered justice, in the name of her emperor the taxes were collected. Yet these civilizations which were the powers of that age have been swept away. Only a few traces remain—a crumbling arch here, a broken statue there, a few yellow manuscripts which preserve a remnant of that classic thought.

In one of the distant corners of that ancient empire Jesus did his work. The little Galilean towns in which

he spoke were unknown in the greater centers of civilization. His hearers were for the most part simple peasants and fishermen. In all his life he probably never met a person above the rank of the obscure Roman procurator who condemned him to death. He himself never wrote a line and no official observers or court recorders were present to watch the scenes of his activity. And yet out of the change and wreckage of the centuries have come his words, more enduring than the empire which condemned him and more treasured than all the art and literature of the Greek genius. It is not until one recalls the obscure origin and the centuries that have gone by and then visualizes the hundreds of millions of homes in modern America and other lands where the record of that life and work is reverently read, that one is in the proper mood to begin such a study as this. In that contrast lies the greatest of all the miracles, the "sign" ever repeated in each generation. The most abiding thing out of all the ancient past is the four Gospels.

But while this is true, we must also be conscious of a further fact. What we have preserved in our Gospels is really only a portion, a very small fragment of what he really taught. That is of course obvious. The teaching of several years we have compressed into a very few pages. Take as an example the Sermon on the Mount. Here is the presentation of what must have been a long discourse, yet the Sermon as we have it can be read through in less than twenty minutes. Or take the case of the parables, whose beauty of form would make them immortal quite apart from the message which they contain. Mark, speaking of the days of his public ministry

in Galilee, says, "Without a parable spake he not unto them." Yet he gives from this period only four examples of these parables. In spite of the number added by Matthew and by Luke there must have been hundreds of these beautiful narratives which have been lost.

Of course this partial character of the written account is inevitable. No narrative can record all the events of a lifetime. A living personality cannot be entirely transferred to paper. The writer of the Fourth Gospel evidently felt this keenly, for he closes his book with the pardonable hyperbole, "And there are many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written." Particularly was it inevitable that the account should be incomplete in the period of the first century when books were written on papyrus rolls and as a result were sharply limited in their length. But these considerations do not quite explain the case. Our account is limited partly because the four Gospels retell to a large extent the same story, and each does not confine itself to recording such incidents or sayings as had been omitted by earlier gospels. Every Sunday school teacher is familiar with this fact. The four Gospels do not tell separate stories, but quite evidently present that portion of the life of Jesus which each one considered most important for his own purpose. Thus all four evangelists tell the story of the feeding of the five thousand, all of them give in detail the story of the Passion, all four tell the account of the cleansing of the Temple. The first three again and again repeat the same incidents, so much so that many so-called Harmonies of the Gospels have been printed, giving the

narratives of these Gospels in parallel columns. Indeed, it has been calculated that in the case of Mark, all but about thirty verses of the story are to be found retold in Matthew or Luke.

The explanation of this fact is to be found in the conditions under which the Gospels were written and the purposes which the writers had in mind.

The early Church had no New Testament. Up and down the Empire Paul and the other apostles had gone, telling by word of mouth the story of Jesus and his power. They used the word "gospel," but they meant by it the good news of salvation which they were proclaiming and not a written record. (See Romans 1:1, 2:16, etc., for illustrations of this original meaning of the word.) How men learned the facts of the story of Jesus' earthly life may best be shown perhaps by a quotation from one of the early Christians. Papias, bishop of the little town of Hierapolis and its environs at the beginning of the second century, wrote as follows: "I used to inquire what had been said by Andrew, or by Peter, or by Philip, or by Thomas or James, or by John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and what Aristion and the Elder John, the disciples of the Lord, were saying. For books to read do not profit me so much as the living voice sounding up to the present day in the persons of their authors."[1] There was no need for a New Testament while those were still living whom Luke describes as "from the beginning eyewitnesses and ministers of the word."[2]

[1] Quoted by Eusebius, Historia Ecclesiæ III. 39, 4.
[2] Luke 1:2.

Thus there was no thought of a New Testament, not even a consciousness of a need for one when the earliest books of the canon were written. Why then were they written? Simply because there arose occasions when these men could not give in person the messages which they felt called to deliver. It was because Paul saw his Galatian converts led astray into a perversion of the gospel at a time when he could not immediately go to them that he poured forth in great emotion the sentences of the letter that we call Galatians. It was because "it hath been signified unto me by them of the household of Chloe that there are contentions among you," [8] that he wrote 1 Corinthians. In the case of Philemon, it was because the apostle was sending back to his Christian friend a runaway slave whom he wished to commend to Philemon's brotherly regard. In all these cases Paul writes with no future generations in mind, but in such a fashion that future generations have found in his letters the portrayal of the mind of Christ and have turned to them for inspiration and for guidance.

So also in the case of the Gospels. They were not written with the purpose of providing biographies of Jesus for future generations, but to meet immediate and specific needs. Each writer had certain definite readers in mind and recorded the things which he felt those particular readers most needed to know. Their motive was evangelical rather than primarily historical. "These things are written," says John, "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing

[8] 1 Corinthians 1:11.

ye may have life in his name."[4] That is the motive and purpose of them all.

This conception of the Gospels is fundamental to any clear understanding of them whatsoever. Once it is gained we have the answer to several of our questions. It is perfectly obvious now why it is that we find incidents and sayings retold in the various Gospels. Each evangelist selected his material with a view solely to the needs of his readers, whether the saying or the event had been described in a previous Gospel or not. Take the story of the death and resurrection, for instance. Can we imagine Luke leaving it out of his account to Theophilus simply because Mark had already narrated it for the Christians at Rome? Or take the illustration which has been already used, the parables. Could any account of the teaching of Jesus be given that did not include certain of these beautiful and characteristic stories? Thus, as we read the four Gospels, we find the stories repeated in part and constantly overlapping, simply because the materials of each were chosen without reference to what some other writer had set down.

And this fact of purpose and objective explains another problem. If we compare our several Gospels, we shall find that frequently there will be some slight discrepancy in the detail of an incident or a difference in the wording of a saying. Some people have been disposed to make much of such comparisons, as if it indicated a sort of failure on the part of the Gospel writers. But the point is that the evangelists never set out to draw up any such systematic set of documents.

[4] John 20: 31.

Writing in different parts of the ancient world, in some cases quite likely not even aware of the existence of the other Gospel, and in all cases more interested in the total impression upon the reader than in the wording of a sentence, such literal agreement was no part of their intention. As a result one may marshal many a difference of detail or of wording. The stock example of such discrepancies is of course the wording of the inscription which Pilate caused to be placed over the cross of Jesus. Here we have four accounts and in no two of them is the wording *exactly* the same. But I do not doubt that if someone had come to St. Mark and pointed out to him that Matthew's Gospel declared that Pilate wrote, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS," whereas his own account stated that he wrote only "THE KING OF THE JEWS," he would not have considered the matter worth the trouble of correcting. In some of the differences, as in the case of the Lord's Prayer, which is longer in Matthew than in Luke, each writer no doubt gave the form in use in the particular Christian churches with which he was acquainted. But in all such differences of wording and detail we are led back to the explanation, that the Gospels are not written with reference to each other. Each writer poured forth the story as he was acquainted with it, selecting his material and writing the story with its intended readers in mind. Each wrote undisturbed by the fear of a difference in wording between his Gospel and some other account, because each was conscious of the fact that he was called of the Spirit to do this work and that the power of God for upbuilding lay in his message.

II

Let us take the four Gospels separately and note the occasion which called each forth. It is generally agreed that the earliest of the four was Mark. Its author was undoubtedly the John Mark in whose mother's home in Jerusalem members of the early Church met. His life, so far as we know it from the New Testament, is a parable: he is never mentioned except as the assistant or helper to some apostle far more prominent than himself. First it is Paul and Barnabas with whom he traveled as an "attendant";[5] then later it is Paul at the close of his life who writes from prison that Mark "is useful unto me for ministering";[6] then it is Peter with whom early tradition states that he traveled as an interpreter.[7] He was a plain man and writes his Gospel with no flourishes or efforts at style. He loved action and his Gospel is almost entirely concerned with the deeds of Jesus. Occasionally he cannot resist the temptation to tell a good story whether it be important for his purpose or not, as his account of the young man who fled from the garden of Gethsemane leaving his one linen garment in the soldiers' hands.

How he came to write his Gospel we know only from tradition, but it is an old tradition and for its main features there are several authorities. The fullest statement of this is given in the writings of Clement of Alexandria. He describes its origin in these words: "While Peter was preaching the word publicly in Rome,

[5] Acts 13: 5; cf. Acts 12: 12.
[6] 2 Timothy 4: 11.
[7] So Papias, Irenæus, Clement of Alexandria, and others.

. . . those who were present, being many, besought Mark, as one who had followed him from afar and remembered what he had said, to write down the things which he had told. He did this and delivered over the Gospel to those who had asked him. Which fact Peter knew, but he neither hindered him nor encouraged him in the undertaking." [8] This most interesting tradition finds confirmation from the Gospel itself in two particulars: it was clearly written for western, non-Jewish readers, for Mark explains even the simplest customs of the Jews; and in the second place its story does have a special interest in Peter and his relation to the Lord. Practically all scholars agree that it was written some time in the period 60-75 A.D.

Matthew and Luke were probably written within ten or fifteen years of the date of Mark. They are alike in that they add to the general story of the life of Jesus which Mark presents many illustrations and quotations from the teaching of our Lord. Luke we know in the New Testament as the companion and physician of St. Paul. He was a Greek, and the Greek literary tradition is evident on many a page of the Gospel. As to the occasions of the compositions of these two Gospels we have no exact information. Luke's Gospel was written to his friend Theophilus, "that thou mightest know the certainty concerning the things wherein thou wast instructed." [9] We may reasonably guess, however, that Luke had in mind a larger audience than Theophilus

[8] Clement of Alexandria. Quoted in Eusebius: Hist. Eccl. VI. 14: 5.

[9] Luke 1: 4.

alone. Certainly he would expect the letter to be read to the church of which his friend was a member. In the case of the First Gospel there is no salutation and we do not know who were the first readers of the book. But every page of it reveals one fact, that it was written with the aim of showing that Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures and Christianity a new covenant superseding the ancient one of Israel. Nowhere is there allowed to intrude a hint of its author's name, but Christian tradition has been unanimous that the Apostle Matthew himself had a hand in the work. There are certain strong reasons for thinking that he was not the sole author of the completed Gospel as it now stands, but that he wrote perhaps an earlier form of the Gospel or else a document—such as a collection of Jesus' teaching—which has been incorporated into it.

These three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, form a group by themselves. They were written at practically the same time, and they deal with the same general aspects of the life and work of Jesus. They have been called the Synoptic Gospels, a term which goes back to the fact that their stories are so much alike that they can be arranged in parallel columns and thus studied as one account.

On the other hand, the distinction and uniqueness of the Fourth Gospel has been recognized from the earliest days of the Church. Clement of Alexandria, for example, whom I quoted a moment ago, concludes his statements as to the Gospels with this striking sentence: "Last of all, John, perceiving that the external facts had been made plain in the gospel, being urged on by his friends and in-

spired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel." [10] His remark splendidly sums up the contrast between John and the others. The Synoptists are primarily interested in telling the facts of their story. John seeks to a much greater degree to make explicit the meaning and significance of that life to the world. The difference goes back to the different conditions under which they were written. The Synoptists did their work at a time when the evangelical zeal of the Church was at its height and when the great need was to proclaim the facts. The Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, was written a generation later, when that first epoch-making century was drawing to a close, and the Christian movement had swept out of its narrower circles and found itself face to face with many new and difficult problems of the Græco-Roman world. The first generation of Christians had now nearly all died, the ardor of the faith had begun somewhat to cool, the Church which had been expecting the immediate return of the Lord was beginning to despair. When John wrote, therefore, he stood between two centuries and at the confluence of two civilizations, the Jewish and the Greek. He sets himself the task of bringing out the eternal meaning of the work of Christ. To do this he selects the events which he feels most important for his purpose and in no sense undertakes to write a complete biography. To the words of Jesus he adds his own convictions. The best illustration of this is the third chapter, in which Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus leads up to verse sixteen, where the discourse changes into the third person and we have that great passage

[10] See Eusebius: Historia Ecclesiæ VI. 14:7.

which begins with the words that might be called the essence of the gospel: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." Truly, Clement was right when he declared that "last of all . . . John, perceiving that his external facts had been made plain . . . inspired by the Spirit, composed a spiritual gospel."

It is because of this difference in purpose and in character between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptic Gospels, a difference recognized from the second century on, that the editors of this series of books have confined this volume to a study of the Synoptic Gospels. Another volume will be devoted to the work of John.

III

With this brief survey of the Gospels, we turn to the teaching itself. What sort of teacher was Jesus? What was his method?

To answer these questions we must study the sayings themselves rather than any book about them. They carry their own message and are their own best interpreter. Before going any further with this chapter I suggest to the reader that he turn to the Gospels and reread some chapter of Jesus' sayings, no matter how familiar its general contents may be. Though one chapter is practically as good as another for this purpose, I suggest either the fifth chapter of Matthew or the twelfth chapter of Luke. If the reader will do this I believe he will find that the teaching of Jesus had the following four characteristics:

(1) It was *natural,* not *formal.* In the first place, the occasion of his teaching was marked by the greatest naturalness and informality. We never read of a prepared address delivered on a formal occasion. The greatest sermon that he preached was out in the open, on the side of one of the low, sloping mountains in Galilee. Repeatedly we find him preaching beside the sea. Frequently he taught in the houses of friends and disciples. Once it is in a desert place. There was nothing stilted or formal in a message that could be delivered in such places as these.

Most of his teaching seems to have been extempore, and therefore completely informal. Even when he spoke at the synagogue services—a forum available for any Jew who had a message to deliver—this seems to have been the case. Take for example the story which Luke places at the beginning of his public ministry.[11] He was in Nazareth and on the Sabbath entered, "as was his custom," the synagogue for worship. While there he was called upon to read the lesson of the day, and the opportunity thus affording itself, he spoke to them of how this Scripture had been fulfilled in their ears. That is the way it generally happened. The occasion arose and he spoke that which he had in mind. Another good illustration is Mark's account of his return to Capernaum after the first journey through the villages of Galilee. "It was noised that he was in the house, and many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, no, not even about the door: and he spake

[11] Luke 4: 16b.

the word unto them."[12] Nor did he need a crowd at all times. Some of his greatest sayings were uttered in the give and take of ordinary meal time conversation. Much of the teaching that we have in the Gospels was delivered by way of answers to people who came asking questions, the rich young ruler, the Sadducees with their absurd riddle about the resurrection, the man who asked which was the chief commandment.

When he taught the crowds the tone of the gathering was still informal and intimate. There are constant interruptions which the teacher again and again utilizes for purposes of driving home his thought. A message comes, for example, that his mother and brethren are without and wish to see him;[13] he uses the statement to impress the lesson of Christian brotherhood. On another occasion a paralytic is brought before him and he does not hesitate to turn his attention to the case in hand.[14] Sometimes there are questions from the hearers, some of them sincere, some framed by critical Pharisees for the purpose of trapping him. He does not refuse to answer. We have cases where the hearers make their own comments upon the matter that is being discussed. Peter seems especially talkative in meeting. Once a woman broke into the discourse with the ejaculation, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee,"[15] and Jesus turns her remark into the general thread of his instruction.

In the content of what he said, this same naturalness and complete absence of artificiality or formality comes out. This is one of the greatest charms of his sayings. There is never the slightest indication of a striving for

[12] Mark 2:1 f.
[13] Mark 3:31.
[14] Mark 2:3.
[15] Luke 11:27.

rhetorical effect. His language is the speech of every-day life, his illustrations are drawn from the commonest experiences of his hearers, the subject of his teaching is the practical problem of what normal life should be like.

(2) It was *popular,* not *logical* or *systematic.* Jesus apparently never aimed at a systematic and logical presentation of his teaching. He did not speak to the crowds of fisherfolk and peasants in the logical manner of a professor lecturing a classroom. Nowhere do you find definitions of terms used, premises laid down, deductions drawn. He did not attempt to transform men by syllogisms. These things are the mechanics of speech; they are difficult to follow and almost inevitably convey a sense of artificiality. Certainly the deepest things of life are not determined by argument. That is probably due to two things. On the one hand, the ordinary person always feels that if clever enough he might find a flaw in the argument. There is a vague general feeling that one cannot believe everything that one may not be able to answer. But there is, I think, a deeper reason than this. Logic divides a subject into its parts, dissects its different phases and deals with them separately. Never the whole is before the eyes save by a synthesis of component parts. Analysis—with the average man at least—is not the method by which people are stirred to great decisions.

Jesus' method was fundamentally different. He appealed to the intellect—note the controversies with the Pharisees in particular—but so far as our records go he never set himself to present his view of God and man and duty in a systematic theology. Instead, what he does is to hold up truth in its wholeness that men may

see it and feel its drawing power. In the longer discourses which are recorded he takes some principle of conduct, presents it now from this side, now from that, illustrates it by a parable, shows its application to life in a concrete example, returning thus ever again and again to the main thought with which he is dealing.

Of this manner of teaching the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew is the clearest illustration. The theme is the nature of Christian righteousness. First it is pictured in the character of those who are truly blessed; then we have it set forth by way of contrast with the Jewish ideal; next Jesus shows what it actually means in practice, taking such familiar illustrations as almsgiving, prayer, fasting, the laying up riches, and criticizing others; there then follows a section on the complete trust in God which is characteristic of the righteous individual; and finally it is closed with parables of warning and exhortation. This is not a logical or piecemeal treatment: the whole subject is constantly before the mind and is exemplified by various means. Several times one finds verses which seem to state the whole Christian ideal with such completeness as to seem to leave nothing further to be said, only to pass on to further illustrations and presentations. That was always Jesus' method. He does not argue or contend, but holds up before his hearers the ideal of goodness and character in all its beauty and power. He made goodness so vivid before the eyes that men wanted to become good. He made God so real before the conscience that men hated their old manner of life.

(3) It was *picturesque,* not *literal.* Many people have made mistakes in trying to understand Jesus because they

have failed to take this fact into consideration. Jesus was in the best sense of the word a popular teacher. His thought was picturesque, full of figures, illustrations, striking expressions, all of which made the meaning so clear that even the most ignorant could understand. "I send you as sheep amid wolves." "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." "I saw Satan falling as lightning from heaven." "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings." "Ye are the salt of the earth." One could go on and on with such striking similes and metaphors. It was his method of speaking and teaching.

"Without a parable spake he not unto them," says Mark. And if we would understand him we must read his teaching in this light. Yet how many times Christian people have refused to recognize this, and instead of seeking the thought behind the vivid, picturesque expression or illustration have insisted on an exact obedience to the letter of the command. "Carry no purse, no wallet, no shoes," [16] and I saw on the street corner of a certain Southern city a man who goes barefoot the year round with the thought of obedience to this command. The distinctive mark of a certain religious sect is the fact they take literally the saying, "If I then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." [17] "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," [18] and many of us have felt it necessary

[16] Luke 10:4.
[17] John 13:14.
[18] Mark 10:25.

to adopt a quite unjustifiable translation of the Greek word so as to make it a small gate instead of a needle. "When they deliver you up, be not anxious how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what ye shall speak," [19] and one finds a preacher every now and then who boasts that he makes no preparation. Thus have we been unfair to Jesus because of the littleness of our own minds. Jesus refused to let the fear of possible criticism shackle him into the exact language of a legal document. He taught in strong, fearless utterances that swept away all obstacles and won their way directly to the human heart.

(4) It was *clear,* not *hidden.* This is implied in all that was said above. In the best sense of the word Jesus was a popular teacher. Crowds of ordinary people would stay all day listening to him, even forgetting their lunch in the eagerness with which they hung upon his words. From that fact alone we might infer that what he said was lucid and clear, easy to understand. The recorded teaching bears this out. What could be simpler or clearer than Jesus' statement of the chief commandment? Or the summary of Christian duty which we call the Golden Rule? Or the parable of the Good Samaritan?

And yet the very opposite has ofttimes been assumed. Many people have tried to interpret Jesus on the assumption that his utterances contain a meaning hidden to the average reader, which must be elicited by systems of symbolism and a network of Scriptural cross references. I have in mind, for example, an interpretation of the parable of the mustard seed in a pamphlet which has

[19] Matthew 10: 19.

had wide circulation. The parable declares quite simply that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all the seeds when it is planted, but when it is grown up becomes a tree great enough to shelter the birds and to give shade to the beasts of the field. The interpretation referred to declares that Jesus meant by the field to refer to the world, within which the kingdom of God or the Church has grown to be a very large affair. Since leaves of the mustard seed are mentioned but no fruit, it is alleged that Christ thus prophesied that the Church would become worldly. And the birds and beasts who are sheltered by the tree then are said to represent the infidels and the worldly-minded who have come into the Church in these modern days. Thus the moral is drawn that the Church should return to a small state more like its original condition. Ingenious? Yes, indeed, but quite opposite to the plain meaning of the parable, the meaning which certainly the hearers drew from it, that the kingdom of God, though in its beginning a most insignificant movement, would expand and grow unto a great consummation, just as does the mustard seed.

His teaching was natural, it was popular, it was clear. And if we would interpret him aright we will take the natural meaning of his words. Jesus came to *reveal* truth, and reveal it he did, so clearly and so naturally that the common people heard him gladly. Of course this does not mean that we will not seek to compare one passage with another upon a similar topic, nor seek to get the setting of a saying to understand its point, nor fail to remember the vivid and picturesque fashion in which Jesus spoke. These things I have tried to emphasize. But it does mean that we will not conceive of

Jesus' teaching as conveying one impression while actually having a hidden meaning that was quite different.

As one looks back over these four characteristics which I have enumerated, the realization emerges that what Jesus actually did was to teach men and women, rather than any set rules or formal system of truth. He adapted his message to their ideas and their experiences. He taught in such a way that they could not forget. He taught them and trusted them to transmit that truth to succeeding generations.

They have transmitted that truth in countless deeds of heroism and devotion. But most of all it has been transmitted to us in the Gospel records of his teaching, which we shall now proceed to study.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. What is meant by "The Synoptic Gospels," and why are they so called?
2. What great advantages to the Christian student are afforded by the overlapping of the several Gospel narratives of Jesus' life?
3. Read carefully the preface to Luke's Gospel. Recalling the facts which are known as to the origin of Mark's Gospel, write an imaginary preface for it of about the same length.
4. Can you give any illustrations of the way in which Jesus framed his message primarily for his hearers, rather than for some future generation?
5. In what ways do you think Sunday school teachers today could profitably imitate Jesus' method of teaching?
6. In the light of the characteristics of Jesus' teaching which have been noted draw up three or more rules which one might adopt for the interpretation of his sayings.

CHAPTER II

JESUS AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

JESUS, we hear it constantly said, was an uneducated teacher trained only in the school of nature and learned only in the character of men and women. This is not correct. He was educated in the whole literature of a people, a literature which includes history, poetry, law, the utterances of prophets and the epigrams of wise men. He was educated in the Old Testament—not formally nor systematically, but by the very atmosphere he breathed, by the home in which he lived, by the synagogue to which it was "his custom" [1] to go on the Sabbath day.

For "The Scriptures," as the Jews called them, were more than simply a written record of the nation's past. They were its law book and its ritual, and ideas and principles contained therein were to be found externalized in practice and living in the institutions of Jewish social life. Thus through countless channels there flowed in upon him the story and thought of the Old Testament Scriptures. The ideas of the people, the hopes that they cherished, many of the acts of daily life, the very terms in which they spoke, went back in a large degree to the Old Testament. In the home in which Jesus was reared and in his own meditation and thought, these sacred writings occupied a particularly important place. Hence if we would understand Jesus, the form of his

[1] Luke 4: 16.

message, the content of much that he said, we must make our approach through the Old Testament.

There is another reason why this subject is important. It will be generally agreed that the Old Testament contains the finest expression of religious sentiment outside of Christian thought. Jesus' contemporaries regarded that book as the infallible revelation of God, which could be interpreted but not criticized or supplemented. One could teach it, but one could not go beyond it. In recent years a good many people have been interested in trying to show that this was Jesus' position as well, and that he would have been aghast to have been informed that his teaching relegated the Old Testament to an inferior position. It is being said that Jesus made no new moral or religious contribution, but simply presented with striking clearness and effect the best that was to be found in the law book of his fathers. The whole position which the figure of Jesus occupies in the sweep of religious history will be measured by the accuracy of this view. Did Jesus simply rediscover the prophets? Did he only apply to slightly different circumstances the religion of Amos and Isaiah and the Psalmists? Did he never claim to go beyond the religion of the Old Testament? How did he regard this older sacred literature?

And then there is a third reason for our raising this question of Jesus and the Old Testament. It is not to-day an academic matter. People on all sides are asking, "What is the place of the Old Testament in modern life? Have we outgrown it? Was it infallible? Is it God's word to man, or a temporary expression of what men once regarded as the highest they knew?" Amid the arguments and too frequently acrimonious debates of

the past few years it seems rarely to occur to Christian people to ask carefully and reverently what Jesus said about the Old Testament.

I

Nobody ever came to Jesus and asked him whether the Old Testament was inspired. That question never occurred to a loyal Jew. The belief in that fact was the one foundation of their whole scheme of life. And so we have no direct specific statement of Jesus which answers that question in so many words. As was said in the previous chapter, the teaching of Jesus is not couched in language especially prepared for the twentieth century. He taught the particular men and women who thronged around him, and trusted them to hand on in many languages and in various words the spiritual insight he had given them. But we do happen to have preserved in the Gospels a saying on another subject which shows conclusively his view of the Old Testament. That is the passage in which Jesus, in speaking of the character of the Messiah, quotes the opening words of Psalm 110, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet."[2] He gives this quotation with the introductory statement, "David said *in the Holy Spirit.*" This was the regular formula used by pious Jews of inspired literature. Such expressions as, "Moses said in the Holy Spirit," "Daniel saw in the Holy Spirit," etc., may be found constantly throughout the Jewish writings which reflect the thought

[2] Mark 12:36.

of that day. The expression passed over into Christian thought, and one can find it in such passages as Hebrews 3:7 and 10:15.

This form of expression has more in it than appears at first glance. The Jews divided their Old Testament into three sections: the Law, which was the most sacred of all; the Prophets, which came next in the order of authority; and the Writings. This last section was the least venerable and the least authoritative of the three. Now the Psalms belong to this third section, the Writings. The fact, therefore, that Jesus refers to the Psalms as having been written "in the Holy Spirit," shows his attitude toward the other books of the Old Testament as well.

But much more important than any formal utterance, we find that Jesus lived in the language and thought of the Old Testament, drawing much of his teaching and inspiration from it. A young man came running to him on one occasion, realizing his own poverty of life, and asked Jesus what he should do that he might be saved. We find that Jesus said to him very simply, "If thou wouldst enter into life, keep the commandments."[3] An incidental reference of that sort gives us, I think, far more than would an explicit statement. Luke tells of a similar question asked by a lawyer, or scribe. In reply Jesus seems to have followed a frequent method of his. He asked him a question, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" and then declared, "Do this and thou shalt live."[4]

Constantly our Lord was content simply to give a verse

[3] Matthew 19:17. [4] Luke 10:25.

from the law or the prophets when questions of deep importance were addressed to him. "What is the chief commandment?" and he answers from Deuteronomy and Leviticus.[5] "Will there be a resurrection of the dead?" and he develops his answer from the words of Exodus, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."[6] "Is divorce right?" and he quotes from the story of creation, "Male and female created he them."[7] He was so saturated with the very words of its pages that it is sometimes difficult to tell whether he is citing a passage or merely putting his own thoughts in phrases that the prophets had used. Compare for example Matthew 23:23 with Zechariah 7:9. Again and again he uses the words of some prophecy or psalm in sentences of his own. Note how he closes his lament over Jerusalem with words borrowed from Psalm 118, "For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."[8]

But even deeper are we carried by the evidence as to Jesus' own personal dependence on the Old Testament for help and guidance. When the temptation came in three alluring forms we find him each time turning for his reply to words from his Bible. Luke's dramatic story of the initial appearance in Nazareth is just as significant: "He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captive,

[5] Mark 12:29.
[6] Mark 12:26.
[7] Mark 10:6.
[8] Matthew 23:39.

And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
And to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

And he closed the book . . . and began to say unto them, To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears."[9] Thus he was content to say of himself and his work, "It is like Isaiah's description." How often in the days which followed must his mind have reverted to that passage! It must have been for him a kind of text which each day he was to exemplify.

And then his teaching. The title which he chose for himself, "The Son of Man," came from the book of Daniel. The description of God simply as "Our Father" he had found in the Scriptures (see Isaiah 63:16, and 64:8, Exodus 4:22, Deuteronomy 32:6, Jeremiah 3:4, 19). He came announcing a "kingdom of God," a fact which is to be understood only by reading the prophets.

In specific cases of teaching we find him repeatedly going back to the Law or the Prophets for spiritual authority. The precedence of humanitarian service over all rules of ritual he found exemplified in David's disregard of the holiness of the "shewbread" when his men were hungry. His teaching about marriage and divorce he drew from the story of creation and declared that because of God's original purpose, "A man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife."[10] The great formula, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath,"[11] seems based in meaning and in spirit, though not in wording, on the precepts of Exo-

[9] Luke 4:7 f.
[10] Matthew 19:5
[11] Mark 2:27.

dus 23:12 and Deuteronomy 5:14. His rejection of the regal and military conception of the Messiah, which usually was expressed as a hope for one "like David," he carried back to Psalm 110, which, he declared to the Pharisees, proved that the Christ could not be like David.[12]

II

All this shows that for Jesus the books of the Old Testament were of divine origin and contained God's revelation to men. But it is just as clear that Jesus did not read the Old Testament as all of equal worth. Portions of it he said were of value only with reference to the historical situation when they were given and were not eternally binding. Some elements good in themselves had to be kept subordinate to others of higher importance. His own sense of goodness and truth guided him in an interpretation of what he read, and he insisted on certain precepts as fundamental, subordinated others, even rejected some, according to the standard of his inner judgment.

This is what he constantly does in the case of Sabbath observance—the point of repeated controversy with the scribes. In the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus are absolute categorical commands: "The seventh day shall be to you a holy day; . . . whosoever doeth any work thereon shall be put to death."[13] "On the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, . . . ye shall do no manner of work."[14] "Ye shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath Day."[15] Such laws make no dis-

[12] Matt. 22:41-45.
[13] Exodus 35:2.
[14] Leviticus 23:3.
[15] Exodus 35:3.

tinction beween work for one motive and work for another. Healing is as much forbidden as harvesting—as the Pharisees repeatedly insisted. Plucking grain on the Sabbath day and husking it in one's hands violated the principle of the Sabbath just as much as reaping on a larger scale. If the law be God's revelation, then this popular teacher, they said, who heals people on the Sabbath and whose disciples violate the law in other ways, is desecrating the Sabbath and holding up before the people an example of disobedience.

Now Jesus read with reverence the same passages, but he did not read them mechanically. He read with a deep sense of their moral purpose and of the value of the Sabbath institution. He remembered that in two lists of the Ten Commandments the purpose of the Sabbath is explained to be the humanitarian desire "that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou, and thou shalt remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt." [16] And he allowed no statement of Sabbath duties, whether in the law or out of it, to contradict this fundamental purpose of making the Sabbath serve human need. The law declared, "Whosoever doeth any work thereon shall be put to death," but he went back of such legal expression and challenged his opponents with the question, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath Day to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" [17] With unerring clearness he laid hold of the permanent and creative element which was in the Scriptures. Thus, without hesitation and in spite of numerous citations

[16] Deuteronomy 5:14 and 15; compare Exodus 20:10 and 11.
[17] Mark 3:1 f.

which could easily be made, he declared, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

Even a better illustration of this selection is to be found in the case of the Jewish ceremonial law. There is no doubt that Jesus appreciated most fully the historic ritual of Israel. He never stripped worship barren of all symbol. He realized the need for expression of that which is felt deeply. We have in the words of Jesus no polemics against the law as such, like those which we find in Paul's writings. Paul talks about being "under the law" as an experience which choked and killed his finer self. But Jesus never felt himself "under the law." It was always to him an expression of the sacred religion of the patriarchs and prophets. He went up to the temple, we find him at the appointed feasts, and his last hours were closely associated with the Passover. He enjoined the leper whom he had cleansed to show himself to the priest and to offer the appropriate sacrifices.[18] He said in the Sermon on the Mount that one who had been first reconciled with his brother should then come back and offer his gift.[19] He was deeply moved over the commercialization of the temple sacrifices and drove out the money-changers with a whip of cords. But he never forgot that all these things were but the expression of religion, not religion itself. These ceremonial laws must give way before moral commands. He read Leviticus and Exodus in the light of Hosea's utterance, "For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." [20]

[18] Mark 1:44.
[19] Matthew 5:24.
[20] Hosea 6:6.

Now all this seems clear and easy for us to-day; but to assert that the ceremonial was of only secondary and incidental importance involved what was, for the Pharisees, an impossible and outrageous presumption. Jesus declared that nothing that went into a man made him unclean, and in that one statement they clearly recognized that he swept away a great portion of the ceremonial law. The Jews thought that if such things as contact with Gentiles, eating certain foods, etc., were prohibited or commanded by law, it followed that the observance of these precepts was necessary for salvation. If men ate with defiled hands, they were sinners, no matter what splendid lives of service might be alleged for them. Judgment, mercy, etc., are fine things, but they are general and indefinite. Washing of hands is a specific, definite thing and is commanded by the law of God. Such specific and definite commands must be obeyed regardless of all general considerations to the contrary.

In this conflict over the washing of hands we see one of the crises of Jesus' life.[21] It is a story of a conflict between two views of the Scriptures—the narrow, mechanical view of the Pharisees and Jesus' deep sense of God, pervading and underlying and uniting the different portions of the text. Matters had come to a crisis, the issue was clear-cut, and Jesus hesitated not for one moment. These ceremonial observances did not actually make one unclean or clean. "Hear me all of you, and understand: there is nothing from without the man, that going into him can defile him: but the things which proceed out of the man are those that defile the man." That

[21] Mark 7: 1-23.

statement was epoch-making. By it Jesus declared whole portions of the Law to be valuable only with reference to the spiritual reality which they illustrated and no longer binding in the letter. But it is very significant that even here Jesus turned to a passage in Isaiah which he felt summed up what he was saying, "This people honoreth me with their *lips,* but their *heart* is far from me." [22]

A third illustration may be taken from Jesus' teaching on divorce. Apparently the Pharisees had an intimation as to what Jesus thought about marriage, so they planned their trap.[23] "Moses said for the husband to give her a bill of divorce and put her away," they pointed out. And in Deuteronomy 24: 1-7 stands the law to which they referred. Nevertheless, Jesus held to his position. The precept was present in the law, but this law was given relative to the conditions of that age, "For the hardness of your heart. Moses wrote you this commandment." But the eternal relations of man and woman are revealed in the story of creation which Genesis tells, "In the beginning, male and female created he them."

The Old Testament also had much to say about a Messiah of military character and a kingdom of political grandeur. But though Jesus regarded the Old Testament as inspired he remained simply unaffected by these passages. In the kingdom of which he spoke one finds no hint of such conceptions as Ezekiel's valley full of the dry bones of Israel's enemies, nor of Jerusalem becoming "a cup of reeling unto all the peoples round about her" [24] nor of a Messiah who shall "break (the nations) with a

[22] Isaiah 29: 13.
[23] Mark 10: 1-12.
[24] Zechariah 12: 2.

rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." [25] But there are other passages of the Old Testament on which Jesus did found his mission: the passage from Isaiah which he read in the synagogue of Nazareth; the phrase "Son of Man," which became his title; the cry of Zechariah, "Rejoice, O Jerusalem: behold, thy king cometh unto thee meek, and riding upon an ass." [26] Probably even more present to his mind than these were the great passages of Isaiah 49, 52, and 53 which sing of a suffering Servant of Jehovah, who was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. In these descriptions he found his own lot most truly pictured and the end of his own career foreshadowed. All the sayings of a king glorious before his enemies and surrounded by his court he put aside, and went to his death saying to his own intimate disciples, no doubt with these passages from Isaiah in his mind, "The Son of Man goeth even as it is written of him." [27]

Thus we see that Jesus not only accepted the statement but lived in the assurance that the Old Testament was an inspired revelation of God to men. But he did not regard that revelation as requiring mechanical obedience to the letter nor as all of the same value. Certain portions had to be supplemented by others, some were given in an earlier day and were adapted to the hardness of men's hearts. One needed to get back of the letter to the spirit of the whole. He regarded his own message as but the unfolding and development of ideas which the

[25] Psalms 2:9.
[26] Zechariah 9:9. See Matthew 21:5. [27] Mark 14:21.

Old Testament had expressed. "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it." He found on its pages messages of God and of life which were of eternal validity. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart"; "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him."; "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want"; "Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes"; "Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." With these and numberless other precepts before his mind, no wonder Jesus was willing to say to the young man, "Thou knowest the commandments; do these and thou shalt live." But always it was obedience to the spirit which comes to fullest expression in passages like those just given.

And this leads us to the greatest of all Jesus' sayings about the Old Testament, sayings in which he brought to clear expression this obedience of the spirit. There are two of these which through the centuries have stood as the great charter of a religion of the spirit rather than of obedience to the letter. The first is the Sermon on the Mount: "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." [28] Christians have come to call this saying the Golden Rule, and to think of it almost apart from the rest of the Bible. We must not forget that it is primarily a saying on the Old Testament. And then the other—a verse which stands at the very center of the Christian religion—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart . . . and thy neighbor as thyself: on these two commandments hangeth

[28] Matthew 7: 12.

the whole law and the prophets." [29] These sayings call for no comment. They enunciate the principle which Jesus found expressing itself through the pages of the Old Testament.

And so for us to-day, the message of the Old Testament seen through the discerning eyes of Jesus can never be superseded. A marvelous thing was accomplished in Israel—a body of literature voicing the cry of human hearts to God and answering with a message of his fatherly, chastening, and patient love, a literature which shakes the citadels of the selfish conscience with fearful demands for personal and social justice, and which leads the humble but quaking spirit into green pastures beside still waters. Yet we needed Jesus to show us how to read it. To him it was not a series of precepts and messages all on the same plane of value. It could not be read as a mechanical revelation. It must be read with eyes of understanding. One must see certain of its truths so clearly that they become tools by which the remainder may be examined and rejected, or interpreted anew. It was Jesus' work to restate and develop and make clearer and stronger this eternal element which he found in the law and the prophets.

SUGGESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. Give illustrations of how Jewish life in Jesus' day would inculcate the story and teaching of the Old Testament.
2. Give at least two quotations from Jesus' teaching which show his conception of the incompleteness of the Old Testament revelation. Give at least two which show his sense of its unique moral and religious value.

[29] Matthew 22: 37-40.

3. State the difference between the teaching of Jesus and that of the Old Testament in regard to the observance of the Sabbath. In regard to divorce. In regard to unclean foods.

4. Read carefully the passage Matthew 5: 17-48. In the light of this passage what do you think Jesus meant when he said, "I came not to destroy the law or the prophets . . . but to fulfill?"

5. What was the attitude of the Jews of Jesus' day toward the Old Testament? After answering this question read Mark 3: 1-6. To what extent do you suppose the difference between them in this respect was ultimately responsible for Jesus' death?

6. Do you think there is more danger to-day of people overvaluing the Old Testament, or undervaluing it? In what practical ways do you think teachers and preachers could help bring about a greater appreciation of its contents and message?

CHAPTER III

JESUS' TEACHING ABOUT GOD

JESUS taught primarily a certain religious view of life. The ethical and the moral elements flow directly from the religious teaching. The more we study the records the clearer this becomes. Everything he did and said springs from a religious basis, his sense of God's presence and God's character. When he taught that men should love their enemies he gave as his reason that God was like that.[1] If they asked him about divorce, he replied, "Male and female created he them," and tried to show God's purpose in the creation of sex life.[2] When he speaks of the reward of goodness, it is in terms of "seeing God," of being "sons of God," of being clothed and fed by God. Mark gives us the right clue to this teaching when he says at the very beginning of his work that Jesus came into Galilee preaching the "good news of God."[3]

I

Yet it was not a new set of theological ideas that Jesus brought. The God of whom he speaks had in main outline been revealed by the writers of the Old Testament. He was, as Jesus described him in the quotation, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."[4] Of course there were expressions in the Old Testament that Jesus

[1] Matthew 5:45.
[2] Mark 10:6.
[3] Mark 1:14.
[4] Matthew 22:32.

would not have used, and there is a new unity, a new emphasis, and a clearer vision in Jesus' thought of God; but nevertheless the revelation of the Old Testament lies as the basis of his teaching.

Only, Jesus took this Old Testament view seriously. He lived it. The reality and constant presence of God became the basis of his life. Therefore, when he spoke of God, what he said was real. He did not repeat theological maxims, but spoke from the fullness of his own life. And in the crucible of his own experience the traditional Jewish view of God was refined. The cruder elements and terms he spiritualized; that which was temporary and imperfect he eliminated; those views which appeared contradictory he frequently brought into a new synthesis. And so there emerges in the teaching of Jesus a revelation of God which in its entirety and its unity is a new thing, though the general outline may be traced back to the Old Testament.

That Jesus took God seriously is the reason why he said nothing which even approaches a proof of his existence. You do not attempt to prove that which is most real to you. For one who lives as Jesus did in constant fellowship with God, a proof that he exists is almost impossible. If God's love and care be the postulate by which we order our lives, how can we by a clever arrangement of words add anything to the certainty that he is present? Jesus' certainty of God was far beyond the stage of argument.

I said he was the God of the Old Testament. The attributes of Jehovah most emphasized in the Old Testament were his uniqueness, his majesty above all that is finite or limited, his irresistible power, his creative activity, and his righteous will.

"O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: . . .
To him that by understanding made the heavens . . .
That spread forth the earth above the waters . . .
The sun to rule by day . . .
The moon and the stars to rule by night." [5]

"Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which hath placed the sand for the bound of the sea?" [6] "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth?" [7] Such passages are typical of the thought of the Old Testament. Jesus' sayings indicate the same picture. "The Lord our God, the Lord is one," said Jesus, citing the daily Jewish confession of faith.[8] He was God, the Creator—"Male and female created he them," [9] "From the beginning of creation which God created." [10] Yet it is only by culling the pages with care that one can find sayings which refer to such subjects as these. Jesus said practically nothing about God's metaphysical attributes, or the history of creation. He kept constantly before him the real problems which men and women had to face. Abstract speculations never pulled him aside from vital reality. We shall have occasion to note this characteristic of Jesus repeatedly as we proceed.

But in the actual concrete world Jesus saw God everywhere. He had imagination; or, rather, I should say, eyes to see. He walked at home in a universe which a Heavenly Father had fashioned for his children. Consider the lilies dotting the fields with color and bordering

[5] Psalms 136: 1-9.
[6] Jeremiah 5: 22.
[7] Jeremiah 23: 24.
[8] Mark 12: 29.
[9] Mark 10: 6.
[10] Mark 13: 19.

the dusty road in their purity—their garments came from the hands of God! The birds that never sow nor reap nor gather into barns are nourished by the daily care of God. In the natural processes of the heavens he saw God's constant activity. He makes each sun to shine. The fresh rain is his gift to good and bad alike. Jesus never relegated God's activity simply to one long past divine act of creation. There is a significant phrase in the gospel, "From the beginning of creation," [11] in which this thought of God's constant activity is clearly brought out. Jesus gave thanks to his Father at the beginning of each meal.[12] He told his disciples to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." [13] He saw in all those natural processes which we call physical laws simply the direct expression of God's active will.

Two things we need especially to notice about this view of Jesus. In the first place, nothing is so small or so insignificant as to escape God's attention and care. He knows when each small sparrow falls to the ground and ends its little chapter of life. He sees to it that the birds are fed and the lilies clothed. He is like a shepherd who is aware of the absence of even one sheep from the flock.[14] Or like a woman who sweeps the whole house to recover a coin that has been lost.[15] Even the processes of each person's growth lie in God's thought—"Which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto his stat-

[11] Found twice: Mark 10:6 and 13:19, and in Matthew.
[12] Mark 6:41, 8:7 and 14:22.
[13] Matthew 6:11.
[14] Luke 15:4 f.
[15] Luke 15:8 f.

ure?"[16] And, more amazing still, in God's omniscience even the hairs of our heads are numbered![17]

In the second place, notice that God does all this directly. The history of religions has always shown a tendency to remove God from direct contact with men and things and to believe in intermediaries, angels or spirits. This is due not only to the thought of God's holiness and exaltation, but also to the reluctance on the part of weak and sinful men to feel themselves directly in the presence of the Almighty. Hence the archangels, the patron saints, the prayers to the Virgin, all doctrines of mediators and intercessors. No justification for such beliefs can be found in the teaching of Jesus. For him the elaborate angelology of Judaism is purely conventional. "Pray to thy Father in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." "Shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" With such words Jesus eliminated all semi-divine agencies from the path and lifted mankind up into the light of God's own face.

But in some hands all this might be turned into a weak sentimentality. We are all familiar with the type of literature that delights to speak of a "divine indwelling force" in all natural processes. God becomes a term chiefly useful in the expression of æsthetic sentiment. Jesus never let the word become a tool of emotional expression. He was trained in the Hebrew Scriptures and the God of those Scriptures is one before whom every man must be fearful. Isaiah had proclaimed "a day of the Lord . . . when the loftiness of man shall be bowed

[16] Matthew 6:27. [17] Matthew 10:30.

down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low . . . when men shall go into the caves of the rocks, and into the holes of the earth, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake mightily the earth." [18] That passage is typical of the prophets, and that side of God's nature is never lost from Jesus' thought. He is "the Lord of Heaven and earth," even in the address of prayer.[19] He holds all things in his hands. "All things are possible with thee," we find Jesus repeatedly saying.[20] There are legions of angels ready to do his bidding.[21] His majesty must not be taken lightly. "I will warn you whom you shall fear. Fear him who after he hath killed has the power to cast into Gehenna. Yea, I say unto you, Fear him." [22] The whole earth is but "the footstool of his feet." [23] Jerusalem is "the city of the great King." [23] The expanse of heaven is "the throne of God." [24] He is omniscient. He knows men's hearts and the events of the future.[25]

Closely associated with this characteristically Old Testament emphasis on the power of God is the thought of his holiness. This element Judaism had greatly emphasized, giving to the word "holiness" a meaning which had some unfortunate consequences; but to that holiness of moral perfection which it was the great work of the prophets to declare, Jesus held fast. "Ye shall be perfect," he enjoined his disciples, "as your heavenly Father is per-

[18] Isaiah 2:12-19.
[19] Matthew 11:25.
[20] Mark 14:36; 10:27.
[21] Matthew 26:53.
[22] Luke 12:5.
[23] Matthew 5:35.
[24] Matthew 23:22.
[25] Matthew 6:18; 6:32; 7:2, etc.; 24:36.

fect." [26] The prayer, "Hallowed be thy name," has the same ultimate meaning. But even clearer than these was Jesus' refusal to have the adjective good applied even to his own person. "Why callest thou me good?" he replied to the wealthy ruler; "none is good save one, that is, God." [27] Nothing could make plainer Jesus' sense of the unapproachable transcendence of God above all that is finite and human.

II

Before that unapproachable power and holiness Ezekiel is said in his prophecies always to have fallen upon his face,[28] and Isaiah had cried out in his vision, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" [29] Jesus realizes just as fully the overwhelming majesty and holiness of God, and there flowed from this consciousness an element of reverence and worship which we must never forget. "My Father is greater than I," we read in the Fourth Gospel, but this thought runs all through the Synoptic story as well. It lies back of the whole worship life of Jesus, the lonely vigils on the mountain side, the prayers for strength and support, the complete confidence in God for strength and help. But no such feeling of God's unapproachableness as we see in Ezekiel and Isaiah exhibits itself in Jesus' thought. For he realized more strongly than did they another side of God's nature. Not only was he above all human limitations and removed from stain and sin, but his goodness consisted in an infinite activity of love. Jesus combined in closest unity that which was primary

[26] Matthew 5:48.
[27] Mark 10:18.
[28] Ezekiel 1:28; 3:23, etc.
[29] Isaiah 6:1-5.

with the prophets and that which was the special contribution of the Psalms. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." "The Lord is full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy." This is the other side of God's character. It is one of the great characteristics of Jesus that he was able in the breadth of his own spiritual nature to bring together through the experience of his own life that union of opposite sides of truth which lesser personalities cannot achieve. We have tended in the history of Christian thought now to one side of this teaching of Jesus, now to the other. We have learned by long experience that neither can be neglected, but we are not generally great enough not to lose one feature in our appreciation of the other.

God's goodness is active love. In some religions the divine being has been portrayed as content and satisfied, engaged only in self-contemplation. There are some splendid pieces of religious literature which develop the thought that God is absolutely passive. He wants nothing. He needs nothing. His activity is concerned only with that which is perfect. *Jesus said that God cares.* He cares for men and women, each of whom is invaluable in his eyes. How obvious that should be! For God cares even for poor sparrows, and "ye are of more value than many sparrows." [30] Indeed, in God's sight man is of more value than even the most sacred institution in the world, the Sabbath Day, for "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." [31] Furthermore, this love

[30] Matthew 10:31. [31] Mark 2:27.

is not merely abstract and general, a sort of divine humanitarianism. God loves each individual. He is like the shepherd who knows each time that a sheep gets out of the fold and is ready to go into the night to bring him back.[32] He is like the woman who will not let the coin stay lost, even though she may have others. "Even so it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." [33] Each individual has a unique and personal value in God's sight, a value because he is just that person and not another. Herein was one of the great contributions that Jesus made to the religious and moral thought of the world. It lies at the bottom of every revolutionary movement on behalf of human rights. It contains in germ all of our modern ideas about the supreme value of personality. Society has always tended to neglect the outcast and the enslaved and to feel that consequences to them do not matter in comparison with the interests of the accepted classes. Privileged groups have, for example, doubted whether the black man has a soul. The great slums of our cities contain just so many "hands," and industry need take no further account of them. But if Jesus' view be right, God carries the burden of each of these persons individually in his divine love. As Immanuel Kant said, you can't think of people any longer as means to an end, they are all ends in themselves. They are such for God. Nor can we simply think in terms of masses or classes. In this phase of Jesus' teaching has lain the dynamic of all Christian efforts toward social change. It is because he kept saying this and living it out that Jesus was not a "safe" man to the

[32] Luke 15:1-7. [33] Matthew 18:14.

ruling classes. He was "dangerous," and they thought it best to put him out of the way. And his followers who have really caught his spirit have ever been "dangerous" to those who were willing to take personal profit out of the life blood of men and women.

Realizing so clearly this side of God's character, Jesus did not fall down in fear at the thought of God as had many of the prophets. Instead, he called him "Father." This term had of course been applied to God long before Jesus used it. (See Isaiah 64:8; Malachi 1:6, 2:10, etc.) But it had never been central in the Old Testament conception of God, the primary thought there being that of Israel's King. Jesus took the term and made it his address of intimate approach. The prayer in Gethsemane is "Abba, Father, . . . remove this cup from me." [34] Luke records the sayings from the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," and "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." [35] In the great thanksgiving passage it is, "I thank thee, Father, that thou . . . didst reveal these things unto babes." [36] When his disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, he told them always to begin, "Our Father, who art in heaven." We are to forgive, "that your Father in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." [37]

One result of this loving character of God is his readiness to bestow his blessings freely. We must rid our minds of the idea that God withholds certain gifts which we may induce him to bestow. He is ready to give even before we ask—that is Jesus' thought. It is his delight

[34] Mark 14:36.
[35] Luke 23:34 and 23:46.
[36] Matthew 11:25.
[37] Mark 11:25.

to give. By many a parable and many a figure Jesus drove home this thought. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts . . . how much more shall your Father in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" [38] "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." [39] Instead of having to earn the blessings of God, they may be had for the mere asking! "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." [40] Notice the tone of that statement, "your Father's good pleasure." Hence why should men be fretted and fearful because of simple needs like food and apparel? "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." [41]

The parable of the workers in the vineyard, all of whom are given the same wage, is a good illustration of how Jesus taught this lesson. To those who had labored for only one hour the lord of the vineyard bestowed out of his gracious nature the reward of a full day's service. And when the other workmen protest, the landlord of the story replies, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil (or niggardly) because I am good?" [42] God is like that. He does not give on the basis of merit, but from the overflowing goodness of his divine grace.

Jesus taught with special emphasis a second characteristic of this loving character of God. His good will extends even to those who are opposed to his rule and

[38] Matthew 7:11.
[39] Matthew 7:7.
[40] Luke 12:32.
[41] Matthew 6:32.
[42] Matthew 20:15.

refuse his fellowship. Matthew 5:44, 45 is one of the central passages in the Gospels. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be the sons of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."

It follows obviously from this last that a readiness to forgive is characteristic of him. The father who loves his wayward son will not close his door when the prodigal appears repentant upon the threshold. God is like that father, said Jesus—a father who ran out to greet his son and whose only reproof was the best robe in the house and a feast of rejoicing. "There is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." [43] The publican who cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner," went down to his house justified, not because of any list of righteous deeds, but simply through his penitent cry.[44] And that Jesus thought of God's willingness to forgive as inexhaustible is shown by his injunction to Peter to forgive seventy times seven times; for forgiveness in the case of men is but imitation of God.

It is against the background of this belief in God which has been described that we must view the deep confidence and joy which marked the life of Jesus. He met one disappointment after another. The people listened to him gladly and hailed him as a prophet, but no mass movement of repentance followed from his work. The religious leaders who ought to have been first to leap to his aid hardened themselves into a vindictive opposition.

[43] Luke 15:7. [44] Luke 18:10 f.

Herod began watching him with suspicion, and from Roman officials he could expect at best only a hard cynicism. Yet never once did he lose confidence. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." Every earthly sign to the contrary, "the meek . . . shall inherit the earth." He taught his disciples to pray expecting an answer, "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven." He saw in his own and the disciples' work, "Satan fallen as lightning from Heaven" [45] and signs that the kingdom of God had begun to dawn.[46] To Jerusalem, standing in all her pride and cruelty, he declared at the close of his life, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." [47] And, even though death in its most cruel form stood facing him, he declared to his followers that his very death would be a ransom for many,[48] and that they who had remained with him should judge the twelve tribes of Israel.[49]

Back of all this is Jesus' belief in God. To the one who penetrates to Jesus' understanding of the heart of the universe, there comes a great restfulness and confidence that nothing can shake. If God be the "Lord of heaven and earth," with whom "all things are possible," then truly blessed are the meek, the peacemakers, the pure in heart, those persecuted for righteousness' sake. With such assurance, why be afraid? And on the other hand, joy! If God be like the father of the prodigal son, constantly ready to forget the sins of the past, if with loving care he knows the things we really need and

[45] Luke 10:18.
[46] Matthew 12:28.
[47] Matthew 23:38.
[48] Mark 10:45.
[49] Matthew 19:28.

it is his good pleasure to bestow of his bounty, if his love is for every individual as that person and no other, then no wonder Jesus declared, "When ye fast . . . be not . . . of sad countenance, but anoint thy head and wash thy face";[50] for all worship has become a joy and all service a devotion. When Paul writes his outbursts of Christian joy, "For ye received not the spirit of bondage unto fear; but the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry, Abba, Father!"[51] or again, the one in Philippians, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; again I say unto you, Rejoice,"[52] he is following in this joyous belief in God which Jesus gave.

III

But Jesus' thought of God was not an easy optimism. There is a stern side to God's character which Jesus presented with as much insistence as he did the thought of love and mercy. I have heard somewhere recently that Jesus described God as a father, but that we moderns wish to make him an indulgent grandfather. The witticism contains a serious truth. Responsible fatherhood is never merely indulgent. The character of God is not one of easy tolerance. In the divine sight, said Jesus, good and bad stand out in radical and eternal opposition. With him there is none of that minimizing of evil, that toleration of wrong which we show so constantly. Evil is really and eternally evil with God. I do not mean to say that Jesus did not teach that there are different degrees of responsibility for sins com-

[50] Matthew 6: 16-17.
[51] Romans 8: 15.
[52] Philippians 4: 4.

mitted, and that God takes into account all those factors of environment, etc., which enter into and are largely responsible for the lives we live. There is a significant saying in Luke, "That servant who knew his lord's will, and made not ready, nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not . . . shall be beaten with few stripes." [53] But at the same time the sharpness of the distinction between good and evil was never dulled in Jesus' portrayal of God's character. God is primarily a being of righteous will who will not compromise with sin and iniquity. Before him we shall have to give answer at the final day. Our obligations to God are more pressing than duty to Cæsar or any other earthly power before which men stand in awe.[54] "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." [55] The man who deliberately sets himself against that divine will, who knows the right but spurns it, who refuses the divine forgiveness and fellowship, for that individual Jesus preaches—just as uncompromisingly as had the ancient prophets of Israel—the certainty of punishment. "Every one that heareth my words, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand." [56] The scribes who devour widows' houses and "make long prayers for a pretense" shall receive "greater condemnation." [57] There are two ways, one leading to life, the other to destruction.[58] There are many who choose this latter path, and Jesus

[53] Luke 12:47.
[54] Matthew 22:21.
[55] Matthew 7:21.
[56] Matthew 7:26.
[57] Mark 12:40.
[58] Matthew 7:13.

never flinched from the prophetic judgment that all such could expect no divine compassion to rescue them from their own wills. There must be occasions of stumbling, "but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh." [59] "Be not afraid of them that kill the body. . . . But I will warn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him." [60] "Ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?" [61] It is true that the picture of this future punishment is presented more severely in the Gospel of Matthew than it is in either Mark or Luke, but it is futile to try to read out of Jesus' mind the thought of God as a Judge who condemns moral evil unsparingly and forever removes it from his presence. The God of Jesus is a God of uncompromising righteousness, and we miss the strength of Jesus if we try to interpret him as in any way seeing a future truce with evil or the admission of it to his kingdom.

But we must not close on this note. Beside the wrath of God there stands always that divine love which Jesus saw and taught so clearly. It follows logically from this teaching that God desires in turn the love of his children. This is the implication of practically all that Jesus taught. One cannot begin to understand God, Jesus taught, without grasping this fundamental thought. It is this which is presented with such perfect grace in the parables of the shepherd seeking his lost sheep, and the woman who sweeps her house for the coin. But we do not need to seek for implications or interpret parables. Jesus was

[59] Matthew 18:7.
[60] Luke 12:4.
[61] Matthew 23:33.

once asked the direct question, "What is the chief commandment?—*i. e.,* What is the primary thing that God desires of men? And his answer came without hesitation, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." [62] The God of Jesus is one who seeks that more than any formal worship or obedience.

Thus Jesus taught that love lies at the heart of the universe, and if we will only see it, the deepest love pulsates through the world; that God calls men into fellowship with and likeness to himself, so that the divine life may become ever more realized in the world; that the divine blessings are freely given to men not on their deserts but because of God's nature, but that the results of continued moral refusal are inexorable. The rest of this small book will be but the elaboration of this revelation of God and the consequences for the life of man which Jesus drew from it.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. Read the account in Luke of the preaching of John the Baptist. (Luke 3:7-17.) What aspect of God's character did John most emphasize? Compare his teaching in this respect with that of Jesus.
2. "Jesus had the most joyous idea of God that was ever thought of." (T. R. Glover.) What is the basis for a statement like this?
3. Do you think that the famous phrase, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God," correctly represents Jesus' teaching as to the divine character?
4. Show how love for and service to our fellow men is demanded by an acceptance of Jesus' view of God.

[62] Mark 12:30.

5. What lessons as to the character of God did Jesus draw from the world of nature?

6. In the light of Jesus' statement that God knows the things we have need of and is ready to bestow them, what should be the primary purpose of prayer?

CHAPTER IV

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

JESUS began his work, says Mark, by going through Galilee preaching, "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news." Quite evidently he preached a good deal more than just those phrases, but this is the way Mark sums it up. If we take the teaching that we have preserved for us, we can verify Mark's statement. It is constantly related to God's "kingdom." The parables begin, "The kingdom of God is like . . ." The Beatitudes are spoken of people who are of such character that "theirs is the kingdom of God." The true aim of life is that men should "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." And just as his ministry began, so it ended—his last saying to the disciples before he led them out into the garden being a confident reference to this same kingdom of God.[1]

Why this unusual phrase? It is surprising to find Jesus speaking so constantly about a kingdom. He despised arbitrary authority and all the trappings and cheap pomp that belonged to the local courts. He said on one occasion, "They who are accounted to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you."[2] The regal robes of Solomon were not so beautiful as one perfect lily.[3] "The kingdoms of this world and the glory

[1] Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25.
[2] Mark 10:42.
[3] Matthew 6:29.

of them"[4] he had once for all put behind him and had chosen instead poverty and obscurity. Why, then, does he speak so much about a "kingdom"?

The answer is in the fact that there was no break between Jesus and the religious revelation which his people had given to the world. He was bred in the Old Testament Scriptures. For him no other foundation could be laid than that which was laid by the prophets and the law. In the forms of his thought he made no fresh start, but built upon the ideas and the ideals that were Israel's contribution to the world. His hearers found no difficulty in acclaiming him a "Son of David" or "one of the prophets." And this sacred tradition of the fathers had talked about a kingdom that was to come.

We might say the same thing in another way. Jesus was not interested in giving abstract truth. He taught men—and women. Furthermore he spoke to the particular men and women who were before him, not to those of some century to come after. He must have been a marvelous teacher, for the crowds would stay all day listening to him. It is only what we should expect, then, to find that he put his message in terms that were clear to them and full of meaning. This phrase, "the kingdom of God," summed up to their minds their deepest social and religious yearnings. And so he spoke of that, changing as he spoke the content of much that they had in mind.

I

The conception goes back to the idea that was fundamental in all Hebrew religion, that God was Israel's

[4] Matthew 4: 8-10.

ruler and king. This was true from the earliest days of the Judges. When Gideon was offered a crown, he replied, "I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you, the Lord shall rule over you."[5] The laws of Moses were held authoritative only because they were accepted as the divine commands. At the beginning of the monarchy we see the same thought reflected. When Saul was made king, Jehovah said to Samuel, the prophet, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not be king over them."[6] The final downfall of the monarchy in both Israel and Judah and the captivity into which the people were led enabled prophets and scribes to enforce the lesson. God alone must be king! An Ahab or a Manasseh who did not rule in accordance with his divine will had no claim to the obedience or faithfulness of the nation. Obedience to God and to him only must be the rule of Israel's life.

Many of the Psalms were composed after the return from exile, and they preserve for us the daily piety of the people. This thought of the kingship of Jehovah over Israel is one that finds repeated expression in them. Psalm 145 is a good example:

> "I will extol thee my God, O King;
> And I will bless thy name forever . . .
> All thy works shall give thanks unto thee,
> And thy saints shall bless thee."[7]

Israel had no earthly king. The hand of Babylon and, in turn, of Persia lay heavy on the land. It is therefore easy to understand how natural patriotism united with

[5] Judges 8:23.
[6] I Samuel 8:7.
[7] Psalm 145:1 f.

vital piety to push this ancient thought that "God is our King" into the forefront of the Jewish confession.

But was God King over Israel alone? Of course not. He was king over all the earth, only no nation save Israel would confess him. The Psalms rise into magnificent stanzas when they speak of the power and majesty of their God:

"God is the King of all the earth, . . .
God reigneth over the nations."—Psalm 47:7, 8.

"The Lord is a great God
And a great King above all gods."—Psalm 95:3.

"The Lord hath established his throne in the heavens
And his kingdom ruleth over all."—Psalm 103:19.

"Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever:
And a sceptre of equity is the sceptre of thy kingdom."—Psalm 45:6.

These are typical passages. The ideas which they convey were part of the spiritual atmosphere in which Jesus was reared.

But this rule of God, though universal, was recognized by only one people and not even adequately by them. Was that all that could be said on the subject? Was there no further word? Every one of the great prophets of Israel was convinced that there was more to say. Some day in the future God would establish the kingdom which was his, and make that which already was implicit actual and visible over all the earth. The heathen rage and the wicked prosper. But a day will come when "the lofty looks of man shall be brought low, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down: and the Lord alone shall

be exalted in that day."[8] God reigns now in part, but in that day he shall reign completely. Zechariah puts the thought in the specific terms with which we have been dealing: "Behold, a day of the Lord cometh. . . . For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle. . . . Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations. . . . And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall the Lord be one, and his name one."[9] In similar words Obadiah prophesied the destruction of Israel's enemies. "For the day of the Lord is near upon all the nations: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee; thy dealing shall return upon thine own head. . . . And the kingdom shall be the Lord's."[10] Or note again a quotation from the prayer book of the people:

> "The Lord Most High is terrible;
> He is a great King over all the earth.
> He shall subdue the peoples under us,
> And the nations under our feet.
> Sing praises to God, sing praises.
> For God is the King over all the earth:
> Sing ye praises with understanding."
>
> Psalm 47: 2, 3, 6-8.

Now the discerning reader will have already observed in these quotations that there had been entwined into this belief in God's complete sovereignty in the future the additional thought that this "day of the Lord" would be a time of reward for Israel and punishment of her enemies. That was an easy inference to make. Many a rough and ready Jew, burning with indignation at the

[8] Isaiah 2: 11, 12.
[9] Zechariah 14: 1-9.
[10] Obadiah verses 15 and 21.

century-long oppression of his nation, no doubt saw in this thought of God's complete Kingship only the element of national revenge. This was an interpretation that Jesus had to face when he later spoke about God's kingdom. We know that even among the temptations that came to him personally there was the lure of the "kingdoms of the earth." [11] But those large visioned prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others, never wavered in their announcement that much evil and disobedience had to be uprooted from Israel as well as from other countries, and that only a purified remnant of their nation would remain after the chastening that was in store. Yet with the same assurance with which the great prophets foretold punishment and chastening, they declared that God's complete rule would mean for the righteous remnant a time of fullest blessing. "God will come as a mighty one . . . whose reward is with him and his recompense before him. And he shall feed his flock like a shepherd, and he shall gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom, and he shall gently lead those that give suck." [12] More explicit, though not more beautiful nor expressive, is the passage in Ezekiel where spiritual and material blessings are both described: "For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. . . . And a new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put into you. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. . . . And I will save you from your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and mul-

[11] Matthew 4:8. [12] Isaiah 40:10, 11.

tiply it, and will lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field." [13] Or take the beautiful passage in Isaiah: "And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion together; and a little child shall lead them. . . . And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy domain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." [14]

These are the simple but essential ideas which the great religious genius of the Hebrew people expressed in its thought of the kingdom of God that was to come. God is King, but his kingship is acknowledged by only a righteous few. These, like Abraham, the type of all Jewish piety, make him ruler of their lives, but the great majority of mankind have either spurned him or given his law a superficial service. But God will not bear with evil always. His power will be revealed and his rule established. God rules, and he shall rule—that is the gist of it. It is truly Jewish and truly religious. And that complete establishment of the will of God "o'er every high tower and every fenced city" will bring, of course, judgment to all things wicked, and to those who have done his will righteousness, joy, and peace.

To this basic thought, hammered out in Hebrew souls during years of exile and persecution, the process of living added in time certain elements and filled out

[13] Ezekiel 36: 24-30. [14] Isaiah 11: 6-9.

various details. It never changed, however, the essential thought. The most important of these developments was in connection with the question of the lot of those saints and martyrs who died before the coming of the kingdom. Would they not share in the glories of that complete rule of God? Were its blessings only for those who happened to be alive at the hour of its manifestation? Assuredly not. God would bring them back to share in that for which they had endured. In Daniel this faith comes to clear expression: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." [15] The resurrection of the patriarchs and the fathers, the community of the righteous of all ages, the destruction of every wicked thing and the enjoyment of God and his blessings—all this was contained in that kingdom of the future for which devout Jews prayed. This meant, of course, that its coming will be a supernatural event, but how else could be ushered in an age in which God's perfect law will be obeyed in every particular and all sin and suffering destroyed?

Would the kingdom be on this earth, transformed into a new creation, as Paul suggests,[16] or in heaven? When will be the hour of its coming? Will not the evil forces in the world make one last final struggle before they bow to the overwhelming power of the divine appearing? Exactly what will happen to the Gentiles in that day? Will God himself establish this kingdom or will he do so

[15] Daniel 12: 2, 3. [16] Romans 8: 19-22.

through an intermediary? On these and other details there are many and diverse answers given by Jews who wrote in the two-hundred-year interval between the Old and the New Testaments. There is no agreement. Sometimes we find the divine rule called "The Kingdom of God" as in Mark and Luke, sometimes "The Kingdom of Heaven" as in Matthew. But no matter how they filled in the details of the picture, every devout Jew affirmed this double belief: that God is King, both over nature and over men, and yet at the same time, to use the words of a book probably written in Jesus' lifetime,

> "His kingdom shall appear throughout all creation:
> Then Satan shall be no more,
> And all sorrow shall depart with him." [17]

I have gone at some length into this Jewish thought of God's Kingship, since without it we are likely to find ourselves in much confusion when we turn to Jesus' teaching on the subject.

II

We can see now why Jesus spoke about a "kingdom of God" as he went through Galilee preaching his good news. He did so for several reasons.

In the first place, the whole train of ideas which is suggested was familiar to those who heard him. It summed up the highest elements in their faith, and Jesus began where they were. He was a marvelous teacher, and he took this theme which they were ever ready to hear discussed, this dream of a new age when God would reward the righteous and subdue their enemies, and talked about

[17] Assumption of Moses 10: 1.

it. He might change the idea, indeed we have already seen how he did transform the "King" into a loving Father in heaven. But nevertheless he spoke of that which was familiar.

Then in the next place, this theme of the kingdom was no new catchword or popular fad. It carried men back to the preaching of the ancient prophets and called to mind stanzas from psalms that were sung in the temples of their fathers. By addressing himself to this theme Jesus associated his teaching with the message of those great spiritual geniuses of the past. Even the multitude recognized this continuity, for some said that he was Elijah and others "one of the prophets." [18] Jesus thus set himself the task of bringing to fulfillment the inner meaning and value of that which those great writers had given. For long Israel had dreamed of the coming kingdom of God. Jesus did not come preaching novelties, but he took as his theme the simple, basic thought in the religion of Israel. As Matthew says in connection with the Law, "He came not to destroy, but to fulfill."

In the third place, Jesus used the phrase because it expressed certain fundamental religious conceptions that he regarded as essential. It is the height of art to be able to sum up an ideal in a phrase. "The war to end war," "Remember the Alamo," "Liberty or death"—such phrases say more than many paragraphs could express. So also in the case of which we are speaking. "The kingdom of God" had a definite content of meaning and it conveyed this meaning more effectively than many hours of teaching might have done.

[18] Mark 8:28.

It meant to every Jew the claim of God to absolute authority over life. The kingdom is God's; he is ruler, he is the absolute sovereign, his law must be the standard of life. Such allegiance to Jehovah was the basis of the religion of Israel. From the early days of the desert the sons of the twelve tribes had made this confession. On no other basis would Jesus proceed. God is our King and his law must be the primary concern of our lives.

It meant the longing for and belief in a better day. It recalled to mind the promises of the prophets that, in spite of all signs to the contrary, blessedness and glory would yet be given to men. It expressed an eternal discontent with careless, sinful, enslaved Israel. It pictured the ideal to the eyes of men. Jesus always set himself to stimulate that divine discontent with the imperfect present. The ideal Israel, the perfect earth—it was that which he called to mind when he spoke of the kingdom of God. And that vision even when imperfect, that hope even when misguided, made men ready for Jesus' message of the will of God and the way of life.

It meant, in the third place, trust in God and in him only. For over six hundred years idolatrous and sinful nations, one after another, had held the Jewish people in bondage to their power. From the beginning of the Exile the captives had dreamed of reviving the fallen glories of the house of David and had made desperate attempts to overthrow their oppressors at moments that seemed opportune. But one pagan power had only given way to another. Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Egypt, Syria, Rome—they had seized the sovereignty, ruled imperi-

ously, crumbled by inner decay and given place one by one to a successor as strong and as pagan as themselves. No wonder the Jews had come to despair of their own strength. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."[19] The centuries had taught them the lesson no longer to "trust in horse and rider and bow," nor "multiply gold and silver for war."[20] To God alone could they look, in him only was their strength. They had become convinced that the blessedness of the future must be established, if at all, by the intervention of God in the affairs of men. Only then would the domination of the heathen be broken. The rule of righteousness would yet be established, but it would be when God was ready to make visible and external that Kingship which was his. And so even when things were darkest there was still hope, a hope that expressed itself in prayer. They were driven back on God. Only by their faith in God had Israel survived the long ordeal of national subjection. Of course there was always the war party in Palestine, but the argument of even that party ran that Israel must merely make the first stroke. They, too, admitted that their hope was only in Jehovah. Thus the "kingdom of God" turned men's thoughts back to God as the hope for a new age. It made all their dreams and visions rest upon a foundation of religion.

It meant—and this is a thought that has run through much of the above—that man's highest bliss would be identical with man's most perfect obedience to God. The prophets had said this over and over until it had passed into the thinking of the nation. The kingdom of God

[19] Zechariah 4:6. [20] Psalms of Solomon 17:3, 5.

would be an age both of complete obedience and of complete blessedness. These two are inseparable. When we remember this it becomes clear to us how it was that Jesus was able to speak of the kingdom both as a reward, as in certain of the Beatitudes, and as involving a duty—"Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness." [21] Only, as we shall see, Jesus insisted on that perfect obedience as obligatory here and now.

And finally, it meant that there could be no complete and perfect righteousness, no accepting the real kingship of God over one's life, apart from association with other righteous individuals. There is no ideal goodness for one individual off to himself. The very word "kingdom" is a social concept—*i. e.*, a group of people having a common allegiance. It was a legacy to Judaism from the days of the nation's early life, when they tended to think in terms primarily of the nation and of individuals only as units in that group. Jesus was the greatest exponent of the rights and privileges of the individual, but he took over from the thought life of his people this great truth of the social life. The perfect rule of God is not over a series of unrelated individuals, but over a fellowship. Jesus speaks of "entering into the Kingdom," having quite evidently in mind this association with other members. There are "few who enter," but only in comparison with the many who remain without. Once he put the matter very clearly. "There is no man," he said, "that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, . . . for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and

[21] Matthew 6:33.

brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions." [22] And on another occasion he made clear this thought of fellowship when he looked around and said, "Who is my mother and my brethren? . . . Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." [23] Jesus did not have to give directions for the formation of a Church. It grew naturally out of his whole conception of the kingdom of God.

Before passing to the questions which follow, questions on which there has been considerable difference of opinion, let us see if we can bring together what has been said. The idea of the kingdom of God goes back to the earliest roots of the Hebrew national and religious life. Jesus used it because it was clear to his hearers and awoke in their hearts their highest aspirations. He used it further because it summed up the great dominant conceptions which God had been revealing through Israel. The kingdom of God means, fundamentally, God's kingship, but it is generally used in the Gospels from the human standpoint—*i. e.*, from the standpoint of the individuals who compose God's kingdom. So used, we might define it thus: a group of individuals bound together by a common allegiance, who do God's will perfectly and on whom God pours forth his richest blessings. Note that we have not yet raised the question of where and when this group exists. That remains for the following chapter. We might put the definition in much simpler terms yet—the kingdom is God's family, those who do his will and receive his richest blessings.

[22] Mark 10: 29, 30. [23] Mark 3: 33-35.

So stated, we see already the fundamentally religious nature of Jesus' message. It was not simply good advice or sound ethics. Its aim was to lift men up into life on a different level, to make life a daily fellowship with God. Behind that conception we can see shining through Jesus' view of God, the loving heavenly Father, one "who calleth his sheep by name." But at the same time we have implicit in this kingdom of God that stern moral demand, the rigorous heroic element, that we must never lose sight of in Jesus' teaching. For since it was to be life on a new plane, there must be a complete break with the old habits and standards.

And so when Jesus appeared in Galilee preaching that "the kingdom of God is at hand," it is not surprising that he stirred the masses to eager attention. A new prophet had appeared who declared that God was ready to establish his reign. No longer need men wonder at the divine delay, no longer cry, "How long, O Lord, how long?" That was the "good news" from the standpoint of the multitude. But to show, as Jesus had to show, that men were not ready for that complete rule of God, that many of those who talked most about it were really unwilling that God should rule, and to make clear what was involved in the kingship of God—this was a long and a heart-breaking task.

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. Discuss the fact that Jesus designed his teaching for the particular men and women of his day from the standpoint of (a) its vividness, (b) its interpretation, (c) its permanent value.

2. Give the origin and meaning of the Hebrew doctrine of God as King. Over whom was he King?

3. In what sense was God's kingship a thing of the future? What changes would be brought about by that future kingship?

4. What elements of permanent religious value were contained in this thought of the kingdom of God?

5. What dangers of misunderstanding and distortion would such a conception offer?

CHAPTER V

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

In the last chapter we saw that when Jesus spoke of "the kingdom of God" he was referring to God's perfect rule over men, a kingdom constituted by men and women who obey God's will entirely and receive his fullest blessings. This far everyone agrees. But when we proceed to ask when and where such a kingdom is to be found, we raise a question to which various and vehement answers have been given by different Christian groups.

It might be said that in a study of this kind such problems had best be left alone. The ordinary Christian is not interested in theological controversies. When doctors and divines debate, the layman had best be off. There is a widespread opinion—with much truth in it—that arguments in theology result in nothing except bruised heads and neglected flocks.

Nevertheless, this subject is of such importance for an understanding of Jesus' message that we cannot refuse to face the question. The kingdom, as has several times been said, sums up the whole of what he taught. For membership in it we must strive, its coming must be one of the petitions of our daily prayer, to gain admission to it is the highest reward. If we would understand Jesus, then, we must ask, "Where and when is this kingdom of which so much is said?" even if the question does require some hard thinking and careful study.

But by our controversies we have really exaggerated the

difficulty. Jesus spoke in terms suited for his own age and adapted to his hearers. We have taken his words and often have seized upon an interpretation which suited us, with little or no effort to get back to the meanings which the words conveyed at that time. Furthermore, many of us have been guilty of deciding beforehand what message *we* feel is needed for the present age, and have then extorted that message from the text. Instead, we should sit humbly at his feet like Mary of old to catch the glory of his own thought and his own meaning. Jesus deserves the right to speak his own message. Sometimes we have made our study more difficult by playing hop-skip-and-jump all over the New Testament, quoting this verse from Revelation, that from the Epistles, perhaps a prophecy from the Old Testament, and trying to interpret Jesus by all these together taken out of their contexts. If we will keep insisting on getting back to Jesus, all of us, and studying his thought, I suspect that many of our difficulties will vanish.

And that leads to a third remark. We must always practice the law of love and charity even with people who differ from us. St. Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth, "Let all that you do be done in love" [1] and surely that attitude should especially mark every sincere attempt to discover religious truth. Religion goes so deep with us, it touches so much that is vital, that one can readily understand how religious differences are acutely felt. Yet what a travesty it is for Christian people discussing with each other the life of Jesus, the very mention of whose name should fill the heart with the spirit of love,

[1] 1 Corinthians 16: 14.

to find in it a subject for acrimonious debate! "Let all that you do be done in love."

With these preliminary remarks we turn now to the question proposed.

I

One view which has had a great deal of attention recently maintains that when Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God he referred only to a future supernatural state of affairs. The kingdom is something which will come all at once. It is supernatural in every respect. Its appearance ends this present age, which in this connection is usually thought of as ineradicably evil. Those who hold this view point to the many passages in the Gospels which speak of the Son of Man as coming on the clouds of heaven, as unexpected as a thief in the night, and sudden as a flash of lightning across the heavens. They call attention to the exhortations to watch and be ready and to parables carrying the same moral, like that of the wise and foolish virgins. These sayings are in our Gospels and cannot be read out of them. Their importance is undeniable, and we will return to that set of passages toward the close of this chapter. But the view that we are considering usually goes further and declares that because Jesus spoke of the kingdom or a phase of the kingdom as in the future, therefore it can in no way be a reality in this present world, and that Jesus never represented it as such. When he urged men to enter the kingdom, he meant, it is maintained, only that supernatural state of the future for which it is our present duty to prepare. When he taught his disciples to pray "Thy kingdom come," it was a prayer for the end of the world and the beginning of a

new age, and for only that. Sometimes this view is found joined with another thought, that of a thousand-year millennium here on this earth, but this is not an element that affects the essential idea.

This view makes the teaching of Jesus concerned primarily with an event of the distant future. It takes the emphasis in his teaching away from the problems of living now and places that emphasis and concern upon the coming of a glorious kingdom at the end of the world. It would have us fix our thought on that future manifestation and live with an eye ever single to that glorious hour. It points to St. Paul's advice to his Corinthian members not to assume cares and responsibilities because "the fashion of this world passeth away." [2] It rejoices in the promise and dwells upon the vision of the celestial city. Quite obviously it is an interpretation that demands respect.

Beside the particular passages in the Gospels to which reference has been made—those of the Son of Man coming "like a thief in the night," like "the lightning," etc.—this view bases itself upon several considerations:

(1) The kingdom is God's rule over a group of people who obey him perfectly and receive his complete blessings. Now neither of these characteristics, it is claimed, is possible in this world. First as to the blessings: We live amid woes and tumults. Only with the eye of faith can we discern the reward. The saints, having borne witness even by the martyr's death, received not here the recompense. The kingdom which contains the reward is obviously a future blessing not yet revealed.

[2] 1 Corinthians 7: 31

(2) So also as to a perfect obedience. We live in a world to the very core of which sin has penetrated. Those who are in the world are necessarily of the world. It is only by separation from it that complete obedience to God's will can be achieved. The habits of life which society forces upon us contain a taint. We are reminded that we must come out of the world in order to be an "elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." [8] I have in mind the decision of a good Methodist woman in a certain city who for religious reasons moved out on a ranch and taught her children herself in order to remove them from the public schools and the common activities which city life makes necessary. For sin to be completely banished, it is claimed, separation from the world must be complete. The kingdom cannot be realized in this world.

(3) Furthermore, the world is bad and is doomed to destruction. There are in it no saving forces. It is beyond remedy. Life here is only a testing, a school, from which the righteous hope for release. This world is under the control of the forces of evil, the next age will show the rule of God.

Those who are familiar with the history of the Jewish people will recognize that the view of the kingdom which we have been discussing is not a new one. It is very old. Indeed, it antedates the coming of Christ and the rise of the Church. It is pre-Christian. It is the view which many Jewish writers who lived in the period between the Old and New Testaments found to be the only source of consolation which they could give to their people. The oppressions of many centuries seemed destined to continue.

[8] 1 Peter 2:9.

The national freedom of which they dreamed seemed no nearer. The heathen lorded it over the righteous. Through trials and disasters, by hope cast down and faith disappointed, they had come to despair of this world. It was evil, totally and irrevocably, given over to the domination of evil. There was a kingdom hidden by God from the foundation of the world which he would some day give to the righteous, but it was in the future. No gleam of its presence could be discerned in the events and processes of their day. God would reign, but it would be only by a divine *tour de force*, which simply substitutes a new world for this evil thing. Over and over again one reads these thoughts in a series of books written by pious Jews in the general period 175 B.C.-125 A.D. which have been given the general name of Apocalyptic Books, because they purport to reveal the secrets of that last great day.[4] These books are numerous and are now well known. They were without doubt read by the people who listened to Jesus. Their picture of the kingdom is not consistent as to details, but the general view presented above runs through them all. If this is all that Jesus had to say as to the kingdom, he presented nothing new. It may be found worked out far more completely and more logically in some book like the *Apocalypse of Baruch* or the *Book of Enoch* than in the Gospels.

II

Much in the view just stated is of unquestioned truth and value. It represents noble aspirations, and has

[4] Apocalypse is the Greek word for "revelation."

been held by many devout Christians. But it simply isn't all of Jesus' view. It takes part of Jesus' thought as if it were the whole. It leaves out part of the evidence.

Jesus, it seems to me, clearly conceived of that kingdom of God as something already existing on this earth and urged men to enter at once into its fellowship and its obligations. He conceived of that kingdom as something essentially in the heart of men, although it soon becomes felt in outward conditions. He said that this kingdom was not at the outset great and conspicuous, but beginning small would grow with time. He declared that God was ready to give it here and now if men would only realize their privilege and accept the gift. But let us turn to Jesus' own words for evidence as to what he taught:

(1) "And he said, How shall we liken the kingdom of God? or in what parable shall we set it forth? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown upon the earth, though it be less than all the seeds that are upon the earth, yet when it is sown groweth up, and becometh greater than all the herbs, and putteth out great branches; so that the birds of the heaven can lodge under the shadow thereof." (Mark 4:30 f.) It is clear from this passage alone that the kingdom of God is not something that comes all at once. It begins small, it grows. Its coming is not simply one great event at the end of time. It exists in part, in germ, long before it is full grown.

(2) "So is the kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed upon the earth . . . and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how . . . first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." (Mark 4:26 f.) This parable again is clear. No picture could

bring out more clearly the process of growth and development which, says Jesus, is characteristic of the kingdom. "But when the fruit is ripe, straightway he putteth forth the sickle, because the harvest is come."

(3) "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened." (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:21.)

(4) These three parables all carry the same point. After the first two, which are preserved side by side in the Gospel of Mark, the evangelist makes this striking comment: "And with many such parables spake he the word unto them." We are thus expressly told that there were many parables of the kind, only two of which are preserved as examples by Mark. By his phrase "such parables" Mark no doubt had in mind primarily their form, yet the fact that all those which he records in his chapter of parables [5] have to do with growing seed and a large harvest from a small beginning makes one feel safe in saying that these must be given full and due weight as representing many others of the same type.

(5) Some scribes came to Jesus who were not content with parables. They wanted something more explicit. "And being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God cometh, he . . . said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo here! or, there! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20.) Unless one refuse to accept this verse as from Jesus, we must stop picturing the kingdom as solely on the clouds of heaven. That is exactly what Jesus told

[5] Mark, chapter 4.

the Pharisees they must not do. And if the kingdom be first of all an affair within, an obedience of the heart to the will of God, then it is quite obviously something that does not await the destruction of the earth or a revelation from the heavens for its beginning.[6]

(6) In Matthew 12:28 and Luke 11:20 there is recorded another explicit statement. Jesus was accused by his opponents of having done a good work (casting out a demon) in the name of or by the power of Satan. In reply he pointed out how such a work as that which had been done was a binding and limiting of Satan and his power. And he then went on to say in essence that just such destruction of Satan's power was the mark of that kingdom of God which had been so long expected. "If I by the spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you." In other words, putting it quite simply, in Christ's work of blessing and release the kingdom began.

(7) In Matthew 11:12 and Luke 16:16 is still another explicit saying, this time in connection with some sayings about John the Baptist. It is a saying not easy to interpret because of the different forms of statement in the two Gospels. Matthew reads: "From the days of John until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence

[6] This passage requires an additional note. The Greek words which are translated "within you" are somewhat ambiguous. They may mean "among you" and some scholars have so translated this verse. (See margin to Revised Version.) But in either case the meaning for our purpose is the same. If the kingdom be "among you," it is just as truly already in existence as if we follow the usual translation. The Pharisees were rebuked for waiting in suspense and excitement when the kingdom had already begun.

and men of violence take it by force." Luke's wording is, "The law and the prophets were until John; from that time the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached and every man entereth violently into it." But in both Gospels one fact is clearly affirmed, that from the days of John the kingdom was in actual existence and men were entering into its membership.

(8) A good illustration of the last point will serve to close this list. When the scribe declared that to love God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thy self is "more than all burnt offerings and sacrifice," [7] Jesus turned and said to him, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." Surely we must not force these words to refer to entrance into an apocalyptic kingdom at some distant future time. Is not this saying an example of that constant invitation which Jesus held out to all who would heed to enter then and there into the membership of God's kingdom on earth?

So much for particular passages. Let us supplement these by two general considerations.

In the first place *Jesus was not a pessimist.* He did not regard this world as hopelessly bad, doomed to destruction. He did not believe that there were in it no regenerative forces. He saw God in it everywhere, active and effective for good. It was here that he differed from the people who wrote the apocalyptic books. They hoped for another age in which God could show himself. Jesus declared God to be constantly active now. In spite of its suffering and its sorrow, it is God's world. God gives its rain and sunshine, clothes the lilies, feeds the birds,

[7] Mark 12: 32-34.

cares for man. Jesus knew that the evil was there—who could know it better?—but behind the evil still he saw God. Even from the evil, God would bring good. "Father, . . . let this cup pass away from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." [8] He foresaw the persecutions of the disciples: "They will smite the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered"; [9] "They shall deliver you up to councils; and in synagogues shall ye be beaten." [10] He saw all that, yet he finishes the statement with the exhortation, "Be not anxious!" When his followers apparently were becoming discouraged he told them the parable of the sower. True, much seed falls on rocks and among thorns and by the wayside, but that which falls upon the good soil brings forth results even to the hundredfold.

Jesus had faith in men. He saw hope even in the harlots and the publicans whom the official leaders had given up. Pessimism sees only the evil. Many of those who brought the woman taken in adultery would no doubt have said, "Stone her! What hope can there be in her?" Jesus, with his sublime faith, not only in this woman but in the good in all men and women, said to her, "Go and sin no more." He never despaired. He amazed Peter by his command to forgive an erring brother seventy times seven times. But even greater than his faith in man was his *faith in God.* He said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." [11] Again I say unto you, If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which

[8] Matthew 26:39.
[9] Mark 14:27.
[10] Mark 13:9.
[11] Matthew 7:7.

is in heaven." [12] Some might call that unwarranted confidence, but one could never call Jesus a pessimist. And because of this faith in God he was able to go to Jerusalem foreseeing his arrest and death, and yet confidently to tell his disciples that the grave would be but the path to victory.[13]

To Jesus the world was the subject of redemption, not damnation. His disciples were to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They should let their light so shine that men would "see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." [14] He saw in the missionary work of his disciples "Satan fallen as lightning from heaven." [15] He taught them to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as in heaven." [16] No wonder that in time they caught his spirit and went out to cross seas and fight wild beasts, convinced that their cause could not fail. Surely the Fourth Gospel puts us on the right track when it says, "For God sent not the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world through him should be saved." [17] The kingdom that Jesus preached was a call to victory through God, not a message of ultimate consolation after defeat.

But there is a second general consideration that we cannot leave unmentioned even though it anticipates a good deal that will be said later. It was objected that the kingdom could not be already in existence because the kingdom consists in perfect obedience to God on the one hand and complete reward from him on the other, and that neither of these is possible in this world.

[12] Matthew 18: 19.
[13] Mark 14: 28.
[14] Matthew 5: 16.
[15] Luke 10: 18.
[16] Matthew 6: 10.
[17] John 3: 17.

First, consider obedience. The objection is misdirected. It assumes that obedience to God's law is a state of static sinlessness which never breaks a precept or forgets a rule. Jesus never so thought of it. That was the view of goodness which he so strongly repudiated in Pharisaism. That is what is called legalism, so many separate laws, all to be perfectly obeyed. Legalism had become the curse of Judaism and Jesus did not fall into the error of substituting for one legalistic code another set of slightly different precepts. He talked about a different kind of righteousness, a change of the inner life, a redirection of the forces of one's whole being and a devotion of oneself to a great ideal. That sort of obedience can be complete in this world. It is that which we see in the life of Paul in spite of errors and failures, some of which are recorded. It was a righteousness of this sort that Jesus awoke in the hearts of the publicans, the harlots, and the outcasts, people who had to struggle against an evil environment and many a vicious habit. We shall see that Jesus thought of God's will for men not so much as a series of laws but as a spirit of life. Obedience, law, commandment—he does use the terms, but he lifts them to a higher level, where the actual meaning they convey becomes rather moral and spiritual liberation, consecration of character, fellowship with God. A righteousness of that sort is a progressive and growing thing. It is not synonymous with impeccability. It is possible here and now. Indeed, in what other station or condition could a devotion of the whole being to a great ideal be better expressed?

So also as to the reward. Jesus looked on life with such penetrating eyes that he saw beneath the superficiality

of material possessions. Rich food and gaudy clothing he saw were not the most priceless treasures in life. God's greatest blessings would be in terms of the inner life, gifts to the spirit and vision and purpose of man. These things God can give and does give here and now. Can one imagine St. Paul going back to his former life? Or St. Francis repudiating his vow of poverty? Or John Wesley becoming a conventional cleric in an easy parish?

III

But while all this is true, Jesus also thought of a reward which God will give his children that will transcend all earthly limits. We shall certainly misunderstand him if we do not keep this clearly in mind. But this brings us to that other set of sayings about the kingdom which were mentioned above, sayings which can neither be disregarded nor taken to the exclusion of all others.

There are many passages which speak of the kingdom as something yet in the future, as a great *event* that is to happen. "Verily I say unto you, I will no more drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." [18] "The kingdom is like unto ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. . . . Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour." [19] "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves cast without." [20] "And if thine eye cause thee

[18] Mark 14:25.
[19] Matthew 25:1 f.
[20] Luke 13:28.

to stumble, cast it out; for it is good for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell." [21] "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea . . . which when it was filled they drew up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, and the bad they cast away. So shall it be in the end of the world." [22] "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that sowed good seed in his field, but while his men slept an enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." [23] In these and many other sayings, the kingdom is presented in quite a different light than in the group of sayings quoted above.

How are we to understand this thought and how could Jesus use the same words to describe two things so very different? The answer is clear. It is the same simple thought of the Old Testament, *God rules* and *God shall rule*. The kingdom of God already present upon earth struggles against ignorance, greed, and cruelty. With a vision of the complete establishment of that rule, men and women have gone forth to make the vision real. They have given of themselves in life and death, those "who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong . . . being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated." [24] We battle here with evil, we are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Looking back on the centuries we can discern progress, a gain here, a victory there. But yet how slow is the advance! All around us we see vice organized for gain,

[21] Mark 9:47.
[22] Matthew 13:47.
[23] Matthew 13:24.
[24] Hebrews 11:33 f.

selfishness joining hands with ignorance, "truth forever on the scaffold," purity and beauty sacrificed for lust and greed. After nearly two thousand years of the kingdom the ordinary slum of an American city is almost enough to make one lose heart. Can we keep faith after the desolations of 1914-1919? Must we not modify our hopes for the future and recognize, as many great thinkers have concluded, that after all evil is ineradicable?

In such hours of discouragement Jesus' teaching as to the kingdom comes with ringing challenge. We fight not in our own strength alone. There is no possibility of failure. Ultimately God's reign will be complete. He is king and he will establish his sovereignty. "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." [25] Through God's power the leaven will yet leaven the whole lump. "The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling and all them that do iniquity. . . . Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." [26] That is the assurance, that is the promise that Jesus gave. The Christian Church must never give up that vision of ultimate victory. When it does, when we Christians admit that complete victory is impossible, we shall become in prophetic language "a people of relaxed hands and trembling knees."

IV

But when will be the day of that ultimate divine manifestation? That question has disturbed men from

[25] Luke 12:32. [26] Matthew 13:41, 43.

the days when Paul found it necessary to write to the Thessalonian Christians on the subject. Many are the apocalypses that have been written declaring that the predestined hour is just before us. Many fanatical leaders have disturbed the Church throughout the centuries claiming the fulfillment of prophecy. The missionary programs of the Church, the endeavors to make our own institutions righteous, the tasks of social service have frequently lagged through such distraction of the interest of devout Christians. What did Jesus say about the date of the end?

The answer is brief but conclusive. Whatever interpretation may be put on the thirteenth chapter of Mark or the twenty-sixth chapter of Matthew, we may be sure that Jesus never told his disciples when that day would be. Once the Pharisees put the question and he answered, as we have seen, by declaring that his questioners should cease saying "Lo here, lo there," but should turn their attention to the kingdom that was already present. The second occasion is given in Mark 13. The disciples, resting on a hill overlooking Jerusalem, asked him specifically about times and seasons. And what was his reply? He warned them of many things—of the difficulties they would meet, of the certain fall of Jerusalem—but refused to name the day of the great consummation. Why? For the simple reason, he declared, that he did not know. "But of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." [27]

That one verse should stop our efforts to pry into the unknown mysteries of God. If Jesus did not know, can

[27] Mark 13:32.

we find out? If he did not regard that knowledge as essential for the founding of the kingdom, can we do less than follow his example? Jesus has shown the way. Our duty is to work for the kingdom, to promote its growth, to enter into its privileges and joys. To God belongs the consummation in his own good time.

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. State clearly the view of the kingdom presented first in this chapter. What are some of the Gospel passages cited in support of it?
2. Compare this view of the kingdom with the Old Testament view of the Kingship of God presented in the last chapter. How does it differ? What literature does present this view?
3. Cite three parables which describe the kingdom as a growing thing. Two or three which describe it as an event of the future.
4. Give the story of the two occasions on which Jesus was asked when the kingdom cometh. What was his reply in each case?
5. Which of the two views here considered is the greater stimulant toward social reform?
6. Explain the saying, "I saw Satan fallen as lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18.) What general outlook on life does this saying imply?
7. Do you think that the belief in the ultimate complete rule of God on earth is of any practical moral value?

CHAPTER VI

WHAT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

THE kingdom is God's rule over man. It exists wherever men obey the will of God. But there's the rub. It is easy to talk of doing God's will—no bigot or fanatic in all the history of religion but claimed that. The priests who led out the children from their homes to die in foreign lands on the terrible Children's Crusade, the leaders of the Inquisition in Holland, the witch burners of New England, the early Mormon leaders—they all claimed to be simply doing God's will.

Jesus knew that trait of human nature. According to John's Gospel he warned his disciples, "The hour cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he offereth service unto God." [1] He knew that trait because he himself had encountered it. His opponents had called him "Beelzebub" and thus posed as representatives of God as they sent him to the cross. They denounced his freedom from restraint, his originality, his spiritual genius, on the grounds that he differed from the Mosaic Law and hence was a dangerous iconoclast. There is little doubt that the people who crucified Jesus thought themselves exponents and defenders of the divine will.

So when we speak of obedience to God we are thrown back on the question, What is God's will? This is only another way of asking, "What is righteousness?" which

[1] John 16:2.

is the question that stands at the head of this chapter. And so we see on closer examination that the subject of the kingdom, or the rule of God, is the framework within which will be found the content of Jesus' real message. The thought of the kingdom—obedience to God and enjoyment of his blessings—is the scheme of presentation, so to speak, carrying within it the vital, powerful, moral message which Jesus gave.

To understand Jesus' teaching of righteousness we shall do well to compare it with the ideal of righteousness which the rabbis were holding up to the people of his day. God's will, they declared, was to be found in the sacred books of the law, and to a lesser degree in the Prophets. The law gave definite precepts and rules of action. These rules of action were of course the divine will, and righteousness consisted of obedience to them. Judaism was thus always a way of life, a code of action much more than it was a system of belief or a philosophy. Pharisees and Sadducees, Essenes and proselytes, might differ and did differ on matters of belief, but in action there could be no deviations. The Torah (or Law) must be kept. Specific obedience to its precepts was righteousness.

Of course individual teachers went deeper than this and insisted on motives and attitudes as well as acts. There are some splendid sayings preserved from the Rabbis of Judaism. But in general we may take the above statements as adequate for our purpose.

Obviously, such a system has very admirable features. All our law codes are built on the same principle. The law says that murder is a crime and certain punishments will be meted out to the offender. But the law must await the overt act. No amount of malice in the heart,

even a determination to kill, brings you within the pale of the law until the intention has issued in action. That is probably the only way in which a legal system can be operated.

But as a religion this system of legal obedience is external and superficial. It fails to get beneath the surface. It encourages casuistry, playing one precept off against another. It makes or tends to make all duties of equal value as being all equally commanded by the law—the tithing of mint on a moral level with the care of aged parents. It limits and defines the moral ideal to one set of acts and one set of restraints. It hardens religion into the duties of one particular period or state of culture. No wonder Jesus with his clear moral sense repudiated the whole system.

I

Jesus declared, in the first place, that righteousness is something more inclusive than any set of rules or prescriptions. It goes beyond the act itself and demands a certain state of the heart as well. In the Sermon on the Mount he shows this in a very striking way. He takes those cases in which no one ever questioned the validity of the written precept, those cases of law at its strongest, and declares that the act or abstention alone is not sufficient. "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not kill; but I say unto you that every one of you who is angry with his brother is in danger of the judgment."[2] "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you that

[2] Matthew 5:21, 22.

every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." [3] "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths; but I say unto you" . . . let truth so dwell in the heart that your yea will mean yea and your nay, nay.[4] The mere outward conformity in all these is not enough.

This thought is basic with Jesus. Goodness demands something within the life as well. The rich men cast much into the treasury, but their gifts, although externally more valuable, he declared to be less than the offering by a poor widow of "two mites, which make a farthing." [5] For there was something which she added to those two small coins that was lacking in the larger contributions. He declared in a crucial case which we have already discussed that nothing from without could make a man unclean, but only that which comes from within, a saying which carries all goodness back to the inner life from which it springs.[6] When the scribe asked him which was the chief commandment, he went behind all external performances and declared that simple love of God and man was the essential thing.[7] He declared that the primary moral issue did not concern itself with details of behavior, but rather with the question whether there existed within the soul a light which would illumine all the body. "Look therefore whether the light that is in thee be not darkness!" [8]

[3] Matthew 5:27, 28.
[4] Matthew 5:33, 37.
[5] Mark 12:41 f.
[6] Mark 7:15.
[7] Mark 12:28 f. and Matthew 22:35 f.
[8] Luke 11:35; cf. Matthew 6:22-23.

II

Thus goodness is within, said Jesus. But he did not mean by that a vapid sentiment or emotion. His demands in regard to conduct were as rigorous as those of any of the ancient prophets. "By their fruits ye shall know them." [9] "Each tree is known by its fruits." [10] "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that *doeth* the will of my Father in heaven." [11] In the magnificent parable of the great judgment [12] "the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world" was for those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited those who were sick and in prison. The parable of the house that was built upon sand was Jesus' picture of those who hear the teachings and no doubt assent, but who "do them not." [13] The goodness within must flow into concrete expression.

The truth of the matter is that Jesus' ideal of righteousness claimed the whole man. He demanded an entire devotion. He refused to divide the nature of man into thoughts and motives on the one hand and deeds on the other. Man is a unit. Jesus did not want new acts or new motives, but new men. He called for good men, not good thoughts or good deeds. His own words here are better than any commentary: "The good man," he says in Matthew 12:35, "out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things; and the evil man out of his evil treasure

[9] Matthew 7:16.
[10] Luke 6:44.
[11] Matthew 7:21.
[12] Matthew 25:31 f.
[13] Matthew 7:26.

bringeth forth evil things." "Ye generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things?" [14]

This thought of wholeness receives a splendid illustration in some words which follow the above quotation about the good man. "Every idle word which men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment." [15] That seems indeed a hard saying. But when one thinks of it, is it not just the idle word that expresses the real self, the nature within freed from all social restraints and formal requirements? The idle word, the chance act—why, every playwright realizes that just such things are the clue to the real character of the person. What Jesus is saying is that the really righteous man is one who can stand judgment even on his idle words, when untrammeled expression is given to the self within: "The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things."

III

But Jesus went further. This whole self to be righteous must have a positive and active character. Goodness is not negative. It is not a colorless abstention from certain vices nor even a performance of a round of stated duties. In his hands it comes much nearer being an inspired passion. Most of Jesus' teaching deals not with prohibitions, but with positive commands. He had no word of praise for passive morality. The young man who had kept all the law is commanded to do something—to sell his goods and give to the poor. One of the most striking of the beatitudes is the seventh, which declares

[14] Matthew 12:34. [15] Matthew 12:36.

that it is the peacemakers—not the peace keepers—that are especially blessed. The climax and close of the beatitudes is one twice pronounced upon those "who are persecuted for righteousness' sake"—that is, those who are in the very forefront of the struggle and are suffering for the cause. He significantly told his disciples that they were "the salt of the earth," which did not mean that they were merely good people, but that a great task difficult of accomplishment awaited them, the seasoning and saving of the world.

Notice too the type of sinners we find Jesus most often denouncing. They are people who have done nothing. In the parable of the Great Judgment the condemnation is because "I was hungered and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye did not visit me." [16] What had they done?—nothing at all. So in the other parables. The priest and the Levite broke no moral law, they merely passed by on the other side. Of the rich man "clothed in purple and faring sumptuously every day" there is recorded no evil except that a beggar named Lazarus lay at his gate full of sores and sick of hunger and he stirred not to help him.[17] The unprofitable servant cast into outer darkness was one to whom a talent had been given, but who was content to hide it in the earth.[18] There is a positive self-motivating quality about goodness. It is a thing of enterprise and initiative.

Perhaps the clearest presentation of this positive outlook on life is Jesus' saying about the devil who went

[16] Matthew 25: 42 f.
[17] Luke 16: 19 f.
[18] Matthew 25: 14 f.

out of a man and later returned. He came back because the house from which he had gone stood "empty, swept, and garnished." "Then taketh he seven other spirits more evil than himself; and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first." [19] Whatever we may think about details of the parable, we must not let escape us the clear issue that Jesus here portrays. The elimination of evil is not enough. One's life will be filled, if not by a new spirit and attitude, then with the old inhabitants. The renunciation of old ideals will avail nothing unless new aims and objectives are set before one. Honesty that merely will not steal, purity that commits no overt act, humanity that simply takes no "undue advantage," these sorts of virtues fall far short of Jesus' definition of goodness.

IV

But what is the nature of that active creative disposition which Jesus called goodness? What is it to be active in doing? The answer is too well known to require demonstration. To his contemporaries constantly holding before themselves the law and the prophets Jesus said that it was keeping the true spirit of the Old Testament Scriptures. To-day it is not so necessary to have the answer couched in terms of that older revelation. We can put it quite simply—it is an active life of loving service.

He summed it up in several utterances which are the heart of the New Testament. Certain of the greatest

[19] Matthew 12:43 f. and Luke 11:24 f.

of these were quite extempore, arising out of questions asked him by some listener. Without undertaking to make an extended list, I will cite three of these great passages which describe the nature of the Christian life.

The first is the familiar answer to the question of the scribe as to which commandment was the first. "Jesus answered, Hear, O Israel . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. The second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." [20] In Matthew there are added the words, "On these two commandments hangeth the whole law, and the prophets."

Side by side with this great saying should be put the so-called Golden Rule: "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them; for this is the law and the prophets." [21]

And then we must add that saying which Jesus apparently uttered a number of times, judging from the variety of forms and occasions in which we find it in the Gospels—"Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister," "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant." [22]

These sayings, to which we could add others almost as clear and conclusive, are the heart of Jesus' teaching. Goodness, the righteousness of the kingdom, is just that, the complete devotion of the self in loving service. To love God and one's neighbor as oneself, to do unto others as you would have them do unto you, to become the

[20] Mark 12:28 f. and Matthew 22:34 f.
[21] Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31.
[22] Mark 10:43, Matthew 23:11; 20:26, Luke 9:48; 22:26.

minister and servant of all—this simple but comprehensive ideal Jesus declared to be the will of God for men.

V

The implications and significance of such an ideal of righteousness will be discussed in a succeeding chapter. But there is still another quality of goodness as Jesus thought of it that we must not overlook. The good life is one of constant growth and progress. It never is satisfied or content. It is always attaining, it has never attained. The really righteous man never becomes self-complacent. This is one of Jesus' most striking, and at the same time one of his most characteristic ideas.

This comes out with unequivocal clearness in Jesus' criticism of certain of the Pharisees. The latter were the respectable leaders of the community, noteworthy for their public rectitude and scrupulous morality. They were good people according to the general judgment of their neighbors. Now Jesus gives a parable in Luke 18:9 f. about one of these Pharisees who went up into the Temple to pray. There was also in the Temple that day a publican—a moral outcast. The Pharisee stood up and prayed, "God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men, greedy, dishonest, or adulterous, like that tax-collector. I fast twice in the week, I pay tithes on everything I get." [23] Now notice that Jesus does not suggest that this claim was not warranted. "But the tax-collector stood at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast and said, 'O God,

[23] Luke 18:10 f. as in Goodspeed, *An American Translation.*

have mercy on a sinner like me.' I tell you, it was he who went back with God's approval, and not the other."

That story needs little comment. Goodness of character is not so many good deeds, be they ever so valuable. It is an ongoing process of the soul. It does not mean character that is fixed, hardened into a mold, but life that is ever growing and reshaping itself to higher ends.

Much of Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees goes back to this point. According to the conventions, they were undoubtedly the righteous of Israel. But the temper of the lives of many of them lacked a basic element. There was in these cases no sense of personal inadequacy; they wanted no nobler life. They were conscious of their goodness and remembered their virtues. They saw nothing wrong with themselves nor with a society that had so many good people in it. And so they had stopped the fountains of growth in goodness. Jesus would not have people continually repeating the publican's experience, beating their breasts and not daring to look up to heaven, but unhesitatingly he declared that a life that was stained and marred, even like that publican's, but which had such an outlook on life, receives God's approval rather than the self-sufficient piety of Pharisaism.

Let us turn to other evidence of this attitude of Jesus. We need go no further than the Beatitudes, strikingly placed by Matthew as a sort of title-page to the teaching of Jesus. These verses taken together picture the kind of character that Jesus said would be shown by those in the kingdom. It is remarkable that three out of the first four have to do with this thought of a constant moral progress and enrichment.

The first one as usually translated reads, "Blessed are

the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of God." This phrase "poor in spirit" is the Gospel equivalent for a very old Hebrew term. In certain Psalms, in passages like Isaiah 61: 1 and elsewhere in the prophets, the term "poor" is used frequently in the sense of those faithful Israelites whose trust and hope is in God alone. It describes "the man who has a deep sense of his deficiency and dependence upon God. Ethically characterized, the poor in spirit are the humble, the teachable, the open-minded. . . . They are to be contrasted with those who are filled with pride, conceit, self-satisfaction, and self-will." [24] In view of this real meaning of the term an American scholar of profound insight as well as learning [25] has recently translated the first Beatitude with the words "Blessed are those who feel their spiritual need, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to them." The chief cornerstone of the ideal character, then, is humble teachableness, a constant openness toward God for grace and strength. This is the quality that attends all growth, whether of mind or of heart.

The third Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek," repeats the lesson, though in slightly different form. The meek are to be contrasted with that type of individual sure of his own rights, confident as to the infallibility of his own opinion, bellicose wherever his own interests are concerned. But it is in the fourth Beatitude that this thought of Jesus comes out most simply and strongly: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness." Here we have held out as typical of the good man a perma-

[24] H. C. King, *The Ethics of Jesus*, p. 207.
[25] Goodspeed: *An American Translation.*

nent yearning of the soul for the ideal of life. We have been accustomed to pass off rather glibly this saying for the use of the definitely unchristian, forgetting that these sayings describe the life of the kingdom. Jesus does not speak here of a momentary state just previous to a conversion experience. It is a constant state of soul which he says should mark every man striving to do God's will.

And it is a familiar fact that great saints of the earth have been men and women with just this quality, people like St. Francis of Assisi, St. Augustine, John Wesley. The Apostle Paul is a good case in point. Here was a man who gave up everything for the sake of his mission and who almost alone spread the religion of Jesus over the known world. And yet he wrote of himself, "I am the least of the apostles, that am not worthy to be called an apostle," [26] or even more emphatically in a letter toward the close of his life, "who am less than the least of all the saints." [27] Indeed, our best comment on this whole aspect of Jesus' teaching might be Paul's own words written from prison with his extraordinary life behind him, "I count not myself yet to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal." [28]

If we look back over this chapter and pull together what has been said, we will see that we have been getting away from particular deeds and specific performance to some-

[26] 1 Corinthians 15:9.
[27] Ephesians 3:8.
[28] Philippians 3:13, 14.

thing deeper and fuller. Men have again and again tried to define righteousness, goodness, in terms of such particular things. It would be an easy thing if religion could be relegated to a part of life, this set of deeds, this part of the week, this habitual behavior. Jesus declared that all such was hypocrisy. Goodness is no less than the whole man given in loving service. He called men to a devotion of themselves—no less than that. And he insisted that the selves which they should devote must never become fixed and set on any level, no matter how high.

It becomes clear as we read that Jesus' thought puts a premium on three things. The first is a completely unified life. Halfway measures will not avail. The whole self must be organized around a central principle of life. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon" is one of the keys, he said, to the problem of living. "When thy eye is single, thy whole body is full of light." The religious impulse must be a unifying principle of living or it is nothing at all. In the second place, it puts a premium on activity, initiative, the inner life expressed in deeds. There is an emphasis on concrete reality throughout. In the third place, it puts a premium on individuality. The fact that religion and conventionality are in many places almost synonymous terms shows that we have woefully missed Jesus' teaching. He emphasized in character growth, change, flux, development. The Christian ought to be ever stimulating, with new appreciations, new depths of conviction, new enlargement of personality.

But what is the basis of such a transcendent thought of goodness? The answer sweeps us away from all thoughts of practical ethics. It was not a theory of ethics that Jesus taught to the crowds of fishermen and peasants

who gathered to hear him. The basis of it all was the thought of God. This is righteousness and this only, because righteousness is in its essence entering into a fellowship with God, and God is like that—completely loving, active in good will, perfect in all ways.

We are dealing here with the most central thing in the teaching of Jesus. From his thought of God radiates all else that he said. God is all loving and all perfect. His rule or kingdom is not over subjects, but children. Being like a father, he seeks love and fellowship from his children instead of servile obedience. Such fellowship must be based on likeness of character. Love is the most characteristic quality of the Divine Nature, a love of all men and all creatures. Hence he who would do God's will as a member of the kingdom will love God and his fellow men. Goodness is God-likeness. Hence it must be for us a constant growth and progress—else it denies its essential character.

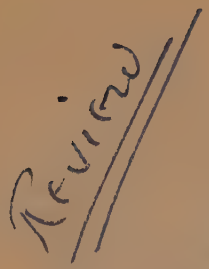
This final thought is simply and naturally stated in the words found in Matthew 5:43-48: "I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and the unjust." And then a little later—"Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

We used to hear more of godliness than we do now. It has rather gone out of style, it seems. People said it was other-worldly. Unfortunately, too, the word seems to have acquired something of a passive note. But it was godliness that Jesus demanded. The greatest teacher of the pagan world, Plato, approached the same conception

when he closed his great book, *The Republic*, with the injunction that we must walk on earth with our eye on heaven. But Jesus went far beyond that. The ranges of his thought leave the metaphysic of Plato far behind. Yet nothing could be more simple or more clear than this teaching, a teaching that applies the very character of God to even the details of our ordinary experiences. "And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the Gentiles the same? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. What illustrations can you give, other than those mentioned in this chapter, of people who have been mistaken in believing that they were performing God's will? Are there any cases of this kind mentioned in the Old Testament?
2. What is meant by "legalism" in religion? Are any traces of this to be found in Churches in our own day? What is the danger of a legalistic formulation of religion?
3. Cite some of the evidence which shows that Jesus thought of goodness as a positive, active thing. Which is the easier to achieve, a "negative" goodness or a "positive" goodness?
4. In the light of Jesus' teaching as to the necessity of constant growth in goodness, can we ever afford to judge our own conduct by a comparison with some one else's?
5. Open your Bible to the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-11. State which phase of Jesus' conception of goodness each one illustrates.
6. Discuss Jesus' teaching on righteousness from the standpoint of its permanent validity. Will it ever need adding to?
7. Show that Jesus' definition of goodness corresponds to his revelation of the character of God.



CHAPTER VII

THE CHRISTIAN DISPOSITION—LOVE

Jesus went about calling men to enter into the kingdom of God. As he preached he also taught what the righteousness of that kingdom meant—active love toward God and man. We have seen how he said that love was the central and dominant element in the life of those who would do the will of God.

We must grasp clearly the all-embracing character of this disposition of love. It cannot be confined to any portion of life. It is not, on the one hand, identical with any set of deeds or habits which we may label as good works. Nor, on the other hand, must we think of it as a general, practical life of "service." It is a light which shines from within. It is an inner attitude finding natural expression in concrete activities. The good deed, the life of service, is simply the mirror of the spirit within. In practice we Christians have tended to weaken the completeness of Jesus' vision because his ideal seems so far above us. We have ourselves to blame in such a case when men begin to doubt the finality of his ethical teaching.

I

But once that character of love is clearly grasped, several elements in Jesus' teaching, at first obscure, become luminous. In the first place, we understand now why he condemns not only the wrong act but the very desire

out of which it springs. "Ye have heard that it was said unto them of old, Thou shalt not kill; . . . but I say unto you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment." [1] "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery: but I say unto you that every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." [2] "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you." [3] These precepts have been frequently criticized as absolutely impossible of obedience and unfair in their judgment. No man can control his thoughts, it is objected. All that one can ask is that the individual suddenly inflamed by anger shall restrain himself from committing an act of injury, that the man who is persecuted shall not retaliate. The person who locks his evil impulses within his own breast there to die for lack of expression deserves, it is asserted, not criticism, but the highest praise.

But this objection overlooks that fundamental conception of Jesus that we have stated. Lust and anger and resentment are wrong because a very different spirit should dwell in the inner life. It cannot be too often repeated that Jesus did not intend for men merely to refrain from murder and its like, but he wanted them to become loving individuals. Such an overpowering emotion of love should exist within as to eliminate contrary impulses. The whole man given in love—that, we saw in the last chapter, was Jesus' ideal of goodness. Against

[1] Matthew 5:21.
[2] Matthew 5:27.
[3] Matthew 5:43, 44.

that background it becomes clear why he declared that anger and lust and a vindictive spirit were absolutely and unequivocally wrong in themselves, quite apart from the question of their expression in deed.

The illustration in the last chapter of how men shall give an account for their idle words makes this principle clear. All of us realize that much of our virtue is forced upon us by environment and circumstance, but that is not the kind of goodness that Jesus demanded. The essential thing is the sort of real self we are, back of the restraints and inhibitions placed upon us. Jesus had in mind individuals who had become innately good, whose very words would carry sweetness and good will, whose strong love of humanity would make desecrating lust and bitter anger impossible.

In the next place, when we understand this conception of righteousness, we see why it was that Jesus never gave rules of conduct. For if the essence of goodness be the activity of love, the moral criterion or guide ceases to be an external standard and becomes an inner light. The Christian who has love in his heart becomes his own moral guide. Of this Jesus was clearly cognizant, as is shown by the two great passages previously quoted on love as the sum of the law. These are so important that it will be worth while to recall them. First, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . and thy neighbor as thyself. On these two hangeth the whole law, and the prophets."[4] And then the other one: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them; for this is the law and the prophets."[5] What further need of

[4] Matthew 22: 37-40.

[5] Matthew 7: 12.

law or rule? Does the loving individual need a catalog of prohibitions? Or, putting it the other way around, could any catalog of duties exhaust the forms of his service? In some cases love drives one to the heart of Africa, in others one's task is at the door. In some situations it is the soft answer that turneth away wrath, in others it is the voice of a prophet demanding justice in the land. Love needs no list of rules; it is a voice which is never silent.

This is why Paul, when he discovered the "riches of the graciousness of Christ Jesus," declared that the law was no longer binding upon the Christian converts. That was a very daring thing for him to say, for we must remember that the center of that Jewish law was the Ten Commandments and that the legal system of Judaism was the highest moral code that the world had known. We usually say that Paul rejected the "ceremonial law" but kept the moral code, but that is only because we have not understood the apostle or his Master. Paul dared to say, "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love." [6] "If ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law"; [7] "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." [8] For Paul had rediscovered this truth that Jesus taught—that love spontaneously performs that which the commandment sought in vain.

This self-direction of Christian righteousness gives to it a freshness ever new. It can never become hardened

[6] Galatians 5:6.
[7] Galatians 5:18.
[8] Galatians 5:14.

into a code destined in time to be outgrown. It becomes a permanent rule of righteousness. This is why the Christian ethic claims for itself an absolute finality. So long as love and service remain the need of the world, just so long will Jesus remain its moral leader.

II

But we shall best understand this teaching of love by asking specifically as to its applications. What does this teaching of Jesus mean in actual practice?

1. First it means *forgiveness*. In ordinary conversation, when one speaks of showing a Christian spirit it is usually a forgiving spirit that is meant. In everyday life to "act like a Christian" means, for the average person, to forgive injuries done us. There is much in Jesus' teaching beside the requirement of forgiveness, but it has produced this general impression for two reasons: the rarity of such teaching in the ancient world, and the force and strength of the language in which Jesus enjoined it. Consider some of these sayings. "How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" asked Peter. "Until seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven."[9] In the corresponding passage in Luke the injunction is "seven times per day." "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors, . . . For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."[10] "Whosoever smitest thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would

[9] Matthew 18:21 f. [10] Matthew 6:12-15.

go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also."[11] The parable of the ungrateful servant who, having received remittance of his debt, was extortionate toward him that owed a hundred pence leads up to the warning, "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts."[12]

Why is this teaching on forgiveness so outstanding? It seems to me that there are two very clear ideas in the general thought of Jesus which come to a focus in the spirit of forgiveness. In the first place, situations which call for the exercise of forgiveness are the test cases, so to speak, of whether one thinks in unselfish terms. Love, everyone admits, is a most commendable virtue; and a generous, hospitable, helpful disposition is admired by us all. That one should be amiable toward one's neighbors, serviceable in the community, kind to stray dogs and the grateful poor—that much of Jesus' teaching is accepted by everybody and requires no special depth of moral conviction. "If ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have you? For even sinners do the same,"[13] as Jesus said. But this natural kindly impulse is in ordinary life reserved for those whom we say "deserve it"; that is, those who have shown no contrary spirit toward ourselves. But what happens when we have been injured, clearly wronged, as we see it? It is then and only then that anger flames up, that retaliation in the most effective way dominates the thought and sentiments such as love and benevolence are thrust aside

[11] Matthew 5:39, 40.
[12] Matthew 18:35.
[13] Luke 6:33.

in the rush of passion. He who can love only those who are generously disposed themselves or those who appeal to his natural instincts of sympathy and pity is only playing at the game of Christian living. The real test is when injury has been done us. Then, if we really love, comes our great opportunity. Only then can the deepest, truest love be seen. That is the acid test which will show whether we value our selfish interests above our brethren. And if we can't forgive, if selfish concerns do really dominate our thought and action, and love is exercised only where these are not concerned, what a farce it is to pretend to the righteousness which Jesus commanded!

In the second place, we must not pass on without observing that in this matter of forgiveness we have a clear example of the fact pointed out at the close of the last chapter, that with Jesus all goodness was grounded in the character of God. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good." [14] Jesus emphasized forgiveness because he saw it in God's dealing with men. In the processes of nature Jesus said there was no favoritism. The richness of God's world was spread before the evil as well as the good. No person, however reprobate, is beyond the possibility of the divine fellowship. God's forgiveness is universal and infinite if only men will turn away from their sin. And so a readiness to forgive is essential to the Christian spirit because that is characteristic of God's nature.

This is the first great application of the Christian

[14] Matthew 5: 44, 45.

teaching of love. Before going on to the second field of application, it will probably be well for us to pause long enough to consider a question closely related to the above, over which there has been much discussion and doubt—the question of retaliation, resistance of wrong.

How far did Jesus take this teaching of forgiveness? Did he mean that wrong was never to be resisted? Tolstoy,[15] after long dissatisfaction, felt that he had found the center of the Christian ethic in that one phrase, "Resist not evil." This in literal form he exalted into the cardinal rule of life. Nor does this passage stand alone in Jesus' teachings; there are the injunctions to turn the other cheek when struck upon the face, to give up one's cloak to an extortioner who would take away the coat, to go the second mile with him who impresses you into service.[16] Does all this mean that the police are unchristian and that aggressors should be allowed to run their course unmolested? What did Jesus actually mean in this doctrine of forgiveness?

There are a number of arguments which could be used to show that Jesus was not laying down a hard and fast rule of conduct, but was trying to teach a great principle which Christians themselves would have to apply to various situations. It could be pointed out, for example, that the Sermon on the Mount deals throughout with principles and not with rules. The teaching about praying in one's closet is surely not to be taken as a rule to be invariably followed. Nor the one about agreeing with thy adversary quickly while on the way to the court.

[15] Tolstoy: *My Religion,* ch. 1-3.
[16] Matthew 5: 38-41.

Nor do we consider it necessary nowadays always to anoint one's head when fasting. Throughout the Sermon Jesus is enunciating great principles instead of laying down exact and literal rules. In the next place, one could point out that Jesus himself used force when he cleansed the temple; and, more important still, on the one occasion when the Gospels record that he was actually struck upon the cheek he did not turn the other, but only made a calm and dignified reply.[17] But it seems to me that the most effective way to consider this teaching and its real meaning is to ask the question which Jesus repeatedly declared to be at the base of all moral problems: What is the course of action which love would dictate?

Now there are two phases of this answer, both of which point in the same direction. In the first place, love for the aggressor himself might sometimes mean the use of force. The policeman who prevents a murder is the would-be murderer's best friend. Discipline is frequently the highest expression of love. Waiving aside the debate as to the value of spanking children, one might point out that it is a poor parent who would not prevent, by force if necessary, his child from injuring another child. But, in the second place, it is a very weak form of piety which in cases of wrongdoing is interested only in the moral state of the offender. The law of love must take into consideration his victims as well. Surely that man is no follower of Jesus who would calmly stand by and see innocent lives starved and maimed because of a special interpretation of the great injunction to resist not evil.

[17] John 18:22.

The policemen who protect a sleeping city are doing a service that Jesus would commend.

All this merely goes to show that in some circumstances love may involve compulsion. But the danger to most of us is not in this direction. For every pacifist among us there are ten who use arguments like these to cover all sorts of retaliation and revenge. Because of the need of social restraint on wrongdoers we allow penal systems that are purely punitive and vindictive. They can only be justified from a Christian standpoint if they are reformatory and educative as well as protective. Because it appears to us that force sometimes may be right, we go to war and preach hatred of the enemy—hatred which Jesus said no Christian in any circumstances can ever entertain. Actually we have very nearly denied this whole application of Jesus' teaching of love, and justified our denial first by silence and secondly by arguments which do not really apply to the actual case. No phase of Jesus' teaching needs more emphasis to-day in the Christian Church than this simple thought, "Thou shalt love thine enemy." Instead of resistance and retaliation when we are injured, he declared that we should love our enemies and be able to pray for those who despitefully use us. Love—and no action not controlled by love—what a revolution that would mean in our personal and social dealings! Is it unreasonable to demand that? Then the whole Christian message is unreasonable, for non-retaliation is but another way of expressing real forgiveness, and forgiveness is simply the heart of Jesus' command of love.

There is a second objection frequently brought against Jesus' teaching of forgiveness which we can only touch

upon. It is charged that this whole thought of non-retaliation is weak, contemptible, and even wrong, because it feeds and encourages evil. Resistance of wrong, it is declared, is the great virtue which this world needs. Jesus' teaching, it is claimed, by exalting passive submission, makes a virtue of weakness, and it is appreciated only by those who are unable to offer effective resistance to the marauder. All of us have probably met in one form or another such criticisms of Christianity. They are best known in the writings of the German philosopher of a generation ago, Friedrich Nietzsche, whose doctrine of the "super-man" was so influential.

To all this there is one clear and convincing reply. The criticism overlooks part of Jesus' teaching. It was not merely passive, merely submissive. On the contrary, no one ever called men to a conquest and elimination of evil so vigorously as did he. Only—and here is the vital point—Jesus believed that there was just one way to overcome evil and that was by goodness. Hate, he said, cannot be destroyed by revenge, even the sort of revenge that claims the adjective "righteous." The wrong heart is only transformed by goodness, a goodness which, we must always remember, goes to the point of real forgiving. "If a man take away thy coat"—Jesus did not say, "Let him have it." He said, "Give him thy cloak as well"—*i. e.*, destroy that evil will by creative goodness. If a man impress you into service to carry his goods one mile, go a second mile. If you are struck on the cheek, do not slink away in shamefaced endurance, but turn the other cheek until the very desire to strike melts out of the heart of the ruffian. Such service as that is not weak submission, but calls for the strongest natures. It does not

accept but sets out to destroy the evil from which it has suffered, and to destroy it by the only effective weapons. It calls for strength, determination, heroism, not for cowardice and weakness.

2. I turn now to the second great field in which Jesus said love should be applied. The first was forgiveness of enemies; the second is humanitarian *service.* True and genuine love of men and women seeks to minister to their needs. The accident of race, the social status of the unfortunate one, the religious affiliation of the person—these things have nothing to do with Christian service. No religion can claim Jesus as its leader that does not set itself to minister, and this, not in order to make converts, but to help life. It is a waste of space for us to give evidence of this thought of Jesus. It is found on practically every page of the gospel story. He constantly exhorted his hearers to give alms, this being the primary channel of helpfulness in the simple conditions of Palestinian life. Indeed, so important is this loving ministry to the unfortunate that in Matthew 6: 1, *2,* almsgiving is chosen as the first illustration of that in which one's "righteousness" consists. It is a righteousness which he repeatedly said receives reward from the Father that seeth in secret. The story of the Good Samaritan, plus Jesus' own example, has made care of the sick one of the special objects of Christian ministry. Notice that in Jesus' thought all such ministry is good for its own sake, simply because it makes happier living. It needs no other justification. True love in the heart finds no other course possible. Lovely deeds of service—these are the true "Church History" far more than the record of creedal debates and changes in organization.

But it is not enough merely to perform acts of philanthropy on occasions when the distress of fellow humans thrusts itself on our attention. Love—the love of Jesus—is positive, seeks the good of others, is a passion for human joy and happiness. One with such an outlook on life will not be content to wait as a servant on human misery when it is possible in so many cases to anticipate and avert it. Prevention is better than cure. It was good to help a slave, but better to abolish slavery. It was splendid to minister to a woman whom society regarded as the property of a brutal husband, but better to denounce and destroy the whole system which makes women chattels. Christian love is not negative, mending the broken humanity left beside the road by the rapacious. It includes others besides the man the Samaritan helped, and it will rid the road of those thieves. Herein is the dynamic of Christian statesmanship, that would save so much of life by changing the way in which our social machine operates. It will be no less anxious to remedy evils that ought not to have happened, to visit the sick and the imprisoned, to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, but it will show its deepest love for humanity in removing the conditions which make men sick or drive them into crime, and in insuring enough for proper clothing and food to those who labor with their hands.

In our highly complex modern life it has come about that much of such work has to be done by special organizations skilled in their particular tasks. We cannot always serve best with our own hands or through our church organizations. The multiplication of such special agencies is likely to make us feel that activities of famine relief, or medical assistance, or the education of backward

communities, is outside the scope of our specified task as Christian men and women. Let us not allow ourselves to be deluded, but claim all such activities that are genuinely serving the needs of the world as specific applications of the Christian spirit and practical means of carrying out Jesus' task. For they serve humanity, and Christian love rejoices in and claims as its own every endeavor to make life better.

3. There is a third field in which Christian love will show itself; namely, in *evangelism* in its truest sense. The Christian view of life would not be entirely satisfied if some philanthropic scheme should succeed in banishing physical pain entirely from the earth. It would rejoice in such a result, it would do all it could to further such a cause, it would never take the position of offering an opposite ideal of endeavor or perpetuating the existence of suffering. But while Jesus fed the poor, his aim was not merely to make full stomachs. He healed disease, but he was interested in something higher than developing athletes. He even called men to persecution, suffering, and death—not for the value of these things, but for the sake of something higher than mere contentment and ease.

A wise parent realizes that there are greater things than physical comfort and will sometimes sacrifice this for higher objects. Affection that pets and pampers is either feeble or unintelligent. Jesus' love for humanity made him sensitive to the highest values of life and made him desire to give these even at the expense of stern self-discipline. He wanted to realize in each man the divinity of soul latent in all. It is not enough that men should be made happy; they should also be made loving. It is better for men to be good than to be prosperous. To provoke

others to love is a greater task for the Christian spirit than to minister to their physical wants. That inner state which Jesus called "life" he was accustomed to declare of more value than all temporal blessings and more to be sought than these. To lead men to love God and their neighbors as themselves is the highest gift of all. Hence the place of primary importance that true evangelism has always had in the Christian Church.

Only it must be remembered that true evangelization consists in the vital transformation of the inner life of the person. It is not identical with church membership. It may require a long process of education to produce in the heart of that individual the flower of Christian love. It may require the combined influence of many factors and many experiences. In the case of foreign missions, for example, it will certainly demand a new type of foreign policy on the part of the Christian governments of the world, one that will show forth the finest Christian tolerance and charity.

And here again, just as in the case of humane service, positive Christian love will be interested in obviating the growth of evil as well as in converting it. Just as Christians must study how to prevent sickness and poverty, so they should study the conditions most favorable to goodness and try to make them reign in the world. For surely, if we have learned anything, it is the power of environment for evil and for good. The hindrances to kindly feeling in any community ought to be of primary interest to evangelical Churches. Those hindrances are usually easily recognizable; frequently they are known in advance, memories of injustices and wrongs, resentments over unfairnesses in social dealings, commercialization of

youth's amusement, flagrant temptation to lust. The destructive work of these is obvious. Surely evangelization involves the removal of such corrupting influences.

But while these and other efforts are part of the process, they must not make us lose sight of the real objective. The highest and final task of religion is a transformation of the inner being by which one is released from all bondage to the world. To walk amid circumstances and yet be above them, to live in the midst of change and destruction and yet be conscious of a destiny, to be at home in the world and yet find one's true kinship with God who is a Spirit, that is the real meaning of religion. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God," "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the sons of God"—such sayings point to the goal. To create this inner life of fellowship with God is the final task of the loving spirit.

All this is the application to practice of Jesus' teaching of love. It is a world task and a life devotion.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. Why did Jesus give no list of rules for Christian behavior? How would you answer the objection that "the law of love" is too indefinite, too general, and too subjective?
2. Which of two people is the better, one who does right from a sense of duty, or one who does so naturally or instinctively? Which kind of goodness did Jesus desire to see in his followers?
3. What are the reasons which make forgiveness such an important Christian virtue?
4. Can punishment ever make a person loving? Is punishment ever justifiable, and if so on what grounds?
5. Is there any difference between arresting a criminal and

going to war with a nation whose leaders we feel to have acted wrongly?

6. How would you answer the charge that the teaching of Jesus advises submission to evil, whereas the duty of every man is to oppose evil?

7. What do you consider to be the most outstanding obligations and opportunities before your local Church in the field of social service? What should be the motive and objective of this service?

8. What is evangelism? Suggest some of the many means by which it may accomplish its work.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHRISTIAN DISPOSITION—HUMILITY, SINCERITY, HEROISM

THE Christian character is comprehended by the life of love: that was the thought that ran through the last chapter. There are, however, certain other traits which Jesus so stressed that they demand separate treatment, even though they are implications of, or closely related to, the spirit of love.

I. First there is *humility*. Most of us do not admire humility. The word calls to mind monks in hair shirts performing acts of penance. Or else it makes us think of Dickens' Uriah Heep. Super-men who dominate the scene are the ones who have our admiration. Accordingly this is one of the elements in Jesus' teaching which is consistently minimized, or at any rate confined purely to the religious sphere.

But Jesus did admire the humble spirit. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican we have already mentioned.[1] If he had given nothing else but that one story, there would be no doubt as to his attitude in this respect. But there are numerous other sayings or parables which convey the same thought.

There is the parable given in Luke 17:7 f. of the servants who, after a day of plowing in the fields, are not invited to sit down and eat, but who must labor further, preparing and serving the meal to their lord. It leads

[1] Luke 18:9.

up to the verse at its close, "Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants." Quite evidently the point of this parable is the same as the one above, that Jesus' hearers should forget their accomplishments and their virtues and continue to serve in humbleness of spirit.

Again there is a saying which Luke warns us we must not take literally for it is a parable: "And he spake a parable unto them. . . . When thou art bidden of any man to a marriage feast, sit not down in the chief seat . . . but go and sit down in the lowest place; that when he that hath bidden thee cometh, he may say to thee, Friend, go up higher: then thou shalt have glory in the presence of all that sit at meat with thee." [2] That is deft but kindly satire on the forward, pushing, self-assertive spirit.

The injunction, "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled, and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted," occurs three times in our Gospel records.[3] A fourth time we have, "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child the same is the greatest in the kingdom of God." [4] The similar statement, "Behold many of the first shall be last, and the last shall be first," occurs four times. These were evidently habitual phrases with which Jesus kept emphasizing this thought which he felt so important. In the Beatitudes one finds "Blessed are the meek," and "Blessed are the poor in spirit," in both of which this quality is contained. And toward the close of the Sermon on the Mount he exhorts men to humility in one of the strongest of all his figures of speech: "Judge not, that

[2] Luke 14:7 f.
[3] Matthew 23:12; Luke 14:11; and 18:14.
[4] Matthew 18:4.

ye be not judged. For why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite!" [5]

In the light of all this (and other passages of like import) we are driven to ask, Why does Jesus so emphasize humility? We have not generally regarded it as so important.

The answer goes back in part, no doubt, to historical factors.[6] The religion of the Pharisees with which Jesus was surrounded accomplished much good, but it also tended to produce a kind of spiritual pride. The piety to which his hearers were accustomed lacked too frequently the elements of meekness and modesty. We remember Jesus' pointed injunction to the disciples, "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them." [7] Accordingly, when he spoke of goodness as requisite for entering into the kingdom, he had to insist that what he meant was *not* like that. We may well suppose that had not the religious leaders of the day been of this type, it would not have been so necessary for Jesus to keep insisting on this particular virtue.

Yet, while this may be true as a matter of emphasis, it must not be carried to the point of denying the vital place that humility plays in Jesus' thought. It needs nothing external to support it. The humble spirit he declared to be one of life's basic qualities.

This was in the first place simply because of the innate fineness of Jesus' own spirit. He himself shrank from

[5] Matthew 7: 1-5.

[6] Cf. the discussion of Humility in Scott, *The Ethical Teaching of Jesus*.

[7] Matthew 6: 1.

all ostentation and pretense. When a woman of the multitude shouted out an extravagant compliment to him, he deftly turned it off to all those who do the will of God.[8] He refused on one occasion to be called good, declaring that only God was good.[9] He made no open claim to the Messiahship, but waited for the disciples to come to their own conclusions concerning him.[10] The self-assertive attitude of the man in the parable who seized the chief place at the feast was repugnant to the whole disposition of Jesus. I am not sure that he was "meek and mild," as the familiar hymn would say, but in him there was absolutely nothing of that unblushing braggadocio which we see so frequently posing as self-confidence. His teaching against self-exaltation goes back first of all to this fine quality in his own nature. He could not think in any other terms.

But in the second place Jesus insisted on humility because, as we have pointed out, he thought of goodness as necessarily progressive and there can be no progress without the humble spirit. A sense of inadequacy and a consciousness of one's need—without such there is no desire for better things. The principle is true in the realm of the intellect as well as that of morals. We don't ordinarily think of Jesus' teaching about humility when we say that a feeling of necessity is the mother of invention, but the principle is the same. One must realize one's deficiencies, else the way is barred. And especially is this true in the moral realm. The person sure of his own excellence is not likely to hunger and thirst after righteous-

[8] Luke 11:27 f.
[9] Mark 10:18.
[10] Mark 8:29.

ness. This was one of the lessons that Paul learned in his missionary work, and it accounts for his constantly reiterated exhortation to his converts not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think.[11]

Closely related to this is a second fundamental principle of Jesus' thought which has already been touched upon. He said that the goal of life is nothing less than to be perfect, even as God is perfect. With that ideal flung out before one, no other attitude is possible. Before that divine standard, humility is simply honesty with oneself, for in the sight of such an ideal even the noblest characters recognize their own poverty. To live in the sight of God, to seek his approval instead of the admiration of men—there follows from such a life and such a standard that unassuming spirit that we associate with the idea of saintliness. We mentioned in an earlier chapter that paradox of the Christian life, that the finest spirits are always farthest from self-appreciation and self-praise. The reason is this of which we are now speaking, that they look forward to the possibilities of life and not backward to what they may have done. In the light of such an ideal as Jesus set forth, why boast our slight superiority over our neighbors? Are we not all sinners, even as the Galileans whom Pilate killed, or the men in Jerusalem on whom the tower fell?[12]

So examined, we see that Jesus' teaching on humility is not a demand for self-abasement, but a challenge to greatness of life. It is because he would have us look upward that he said, "Blessed are the meek." Christian

[11] Romans 12:3, 12:16, 11:20, etc.
[12] Luke 13:2-5.

humility is based on aspiration rather than despair—aspiration combined with honesty. The eye is on ahead. It does not say, "I abase myself," but rather with St. Paul, "I have not yet apprehended." It is the foil to a deep, true self-respect. It knows in the personal realm not to cast that which is holy unto the dogs. It does not give the pearls of one's inner life unto the irreverent and brutal, lest they trample them under feet. But it sees clearly our own shortcomings and feels deeply our personal need. From the root of such humility there come the loveliest flowers, modesty, sympathy, charity of spirit, aspiration for the ideal, constant gratitude for the goodness of God.

II

The second of these traits is *sincerity*. This is also primary with Jesus. The idea conveyed by the word appears and reappears in almost every phase of his teaching. Absolute honesty of life, conformity of the outer deed with the inner spirit—that is to Jesus essential for the life of God's kingdom. In the above pages we have already had occasion to see the vital place that sincerity occupies. Thus we saw that righteousness cannot consist in an act which does not fully represent the intent of the heart. Or, to say the same thing in other words, sincerity is an element that enters into all goodness. So also we saw two paragraphs above that Christ's emphasis on humility could be traced back in part to this thought, honesty with oneself in the face of an absolute ideal. Everywhere, in all his dealings, this demand for frankness, candor, sincerity comes out. "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them,

else ye have no reward."[13] "When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth"[14]—lest ever an insincere motive creep in to spoil the goodness of the need. "When thou prayest, enter into thy inner chamber,"[15] and, "When thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou be not seen of men to fast, but of thy Father which is in secret."[16] In such specific and even extreme illustrations he tried to make his hearers catch his own contempt for insincerity of act as well as of word. His worst epithet was the terrible, "Thou hypocrite!"

He expressed the idea in all sorts of ways that his disciples and the attending multitude might get the meaning and feel its charm. Sometimes it was in figures from nature insisting upon this conformity of the inner and the outer life: "Make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by its fruit."[17] Sometimes it was in concrete application to problems of everyday life.

One of the most interesting of these was the occasion when Jesus spoke about swearing. "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shall perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all . . . but let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: and whatsoever is more than these is evil."[18] What was wrong with swearing? That it used certain syllables of religious speech? Not at all, said Jesus. Swearing is wrong whether it be done with the words "heaven" or "earth" or "Jerusalem" or even with your own "head." The wrong was in the whole system

[13] Matthew 6: 1.
[14] Matthew 6: 3.
[15] Matthew 6: 6.
[16] Matthew 6: 17.
[17] Matthew 12: 33.
[18] Matthew 5: 33 f.

of degrees of truthfulness implied by oaths. That the plain statement was not to be trusted, that the assertion backed by an oath was more trustworthy, that the use of certain more sacred terms would make the utterance more dependable, this was what Jesus wanted to sweep away. Oriental bargaining, like western bargain driving, daily would illustrate this loose attitude toward truth. On the contrary, said Jesus, let all speech be the very truth. The distinction currently recognized between statements sworn to and those not so supported should be absolutely abolished. Simple yea should mean yea, for deceit and hypocrisy are basic sins.

One does not need to elaborate the constituent character of this principle of honesty in any attempt at high character. There are two or three points which might well be stressed, however. In the first place we must remember that sincerity with Jesus is not so much telling the truth about facts of experience as it is candidly expressing in speech and deed our own real self. Remember that it is not the "common liar" whom Jesus condemns so frequently, but the dissembler, the hypocrite, the man who pretends to be other than he really is. This kind of dishonesty he regarded as the grossest and most dangerous sin; for it strikes at the possibility of repentance and reformation. That is the vicious thing about pretense; it is so very self-deceptive. Take, for example, the case that Jesus once spoke of, the hypocrites who sound a trumpet before themselves in the synagogues or in the streets preparatory to giving alms, "that they may have glory of men." [19] There was no love of mankind in their

[19] Matthew 6:2.

hearts; they suffered no intensity of sympathy on seeing the helpless and the needy. Nothing in the inner life corresponded to this show of philanthropy and hence it was far from winning the approval and reward of a "Father who seeth in secret." But it did win public applause and commendation. Men said of such a man that he was worthy and noble and generous. And so the intense danger of the man contenting his better nature with this counterfeit goodness, this substitute for true charity and benevolence. A pretense at goodness is fearfully dangerous, for sooner or later it is likely to make the man self-satisfied and complacent even in his selfishness and hardness, convinced that he is a good and righteous person. Hence the necessity of looking oneself squarely in the face; for without this there is little chance of moral progress. This is why Jesus so bitterly denounced the hypocritical selfishness of the Pharisees, men who claimed to be religious leaders of the people, while the frankly avaricious class of publicans drew no such special condemnation. Selfishness frankly and openly admitted gives more grounds for hope than selfishness that pretends that it is interested solely in religious service. Honesty of life is a basic virtue.

But when one reads the Gospels one has the feeling, I think, that this insistence on honesty with Jesus is not so much on a particular virtue as it is on a certain disposition, on a kind of character rather than on a trait or department of morals. One feels that what Jesus aimed at was that luminous, open disposition that instantly attracts. There is something repelling about the person who never gives you the impression that he is being quite sincere. Those who are frank and candid draw our

love, assuming, of course, that the personality thus revealing itself is one of virtue. When one looks at the various sayings which we have collected under this heading, the condemnation of hypocrisy, the injunction to let yea be yea and nay be nay, the warning about our being judged by our idle words, the saying, "Make the tree good and its fruit good," the conviction grows that it is this larger type of sincerity which he has in mind and not merely the virtue of honesty as it is commonly understood. And this leads on to a statement to which we will return —one amply justified, however, by what we have already noted, that after all, Jesus did not so much enjoin various virtues as a certain quality of life, a life in which the several virtues merge into and unite with one another.

III

The third trait is *courage*. What has been said thus far shows one thing very clearly, that the demand of Jesus' message was no easy thing. It was radically different from our halfway measures. He called men to enter the kingdom of God, to find a new life in devotion to God's purposes. But that call demands giving up all selfish interests and hopes, which means for most of us practically all that we hold dear. Not only so, but it involves, as no one saw more clearly than Jesus, facing the opposition of those who hold the power in this world. He called his disciples to no less a task than the elimination of evil in the world; and that means, without any shadow of question, the organized antagonism and personal hatred of those who wish to hold to that evil. Ac-

cordingly, the discipleship of Jesus is not for the weak and afraid. It does not simply urge heroism—it demands it.

In two ways it puts a premium on the element of courage and daring. First, in that it implies the sacrifice of all of the selfish aims of life for the sake of that which is felt to be nobler. It involves for the individual what appears to be a tremendous risk. Physical enjoyment, power used selfishly, egoism in its various manifestations—all these we see to be immediately satisfying. Are we to renounce all these, throw away the progress we have made toward attaining them, and follow an ideal of life unselfishly lived? That involves the greatest personal risk. It means trusting in our sense of value to the point of renouncing what most men have sought for generations. Dare we do that? Have we the power of resolution, a sense of daring and courage great enough?

We are all familiar with two types of temperament. One is cautious, conservative, releases no present good until a better is already in hand, is unwilling to take great chances, is afraid to turn loose the things it has known for the sake of something new. Its stirrings of soul have been trained to do nothing radical. It will not countenance a break with the old order of things either socially or personally. It is the type of mind that has become encrusted, bound within narrow confines by inhibitions and fears. It is incapable of a complete and radical decision. The other type of temperament is the sort one sees on a battle field when youth, full of strength and hope, throws itself into the jaws of death for the sake of something believed to be fine and splendid. That

spirit dares and risks, hazards the present for the sake of what is to be, sees the ideal as worth all the sacrifice, is free from inner bondage and able to respond to the appeal of the highest. That is the spirit that breaks new ground, that leads boldly. It is pathetic that we think of it usually as being confined to youth.

This power and willingness to risk all for the sake of the highest good is demanded by the life of the kingdom. Jesus never thinks of men halting and hesitating between two aims. He has in mind men who have the courage to make a great decision. "No man putting his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God," he told them.[20] He called to the disciples to leave their nets and come to a different kind of catching. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field; which a man found, and hid; and *in his joy* goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." [21] Or again, it is "like unto a merchant seeking goodly pearls, and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." [22] The men in these parables had to be men not only of decision, but of confident courage. There runs throughout the teaching of Jesus the implication of just such qualities of daring in the moral realm as essential to citizenship in the kingdom. His whole conception of the life of the kingdom is based on the thought of decisions in which men and women "for joy" give up all lesser values for the sake of the ideal good. But that requires an heroic quality of life that men fail

[20] Luke 9: 62.
[21] Matthew 13: 44.
[22] Matthew 13: 45 f.

to see as one of the Christian demands because they have too often dulled the sharpness of that decision.[23]

In the second place, Jesus knew that the life of the kingdom would not be one of public approval. Conflict was inevitable. He knew that from bitter personal experience as well as from the simple logic of life. For the life of which he spoke was to be one of loving service and devotion, and the conflict of that sort of living with the desires of those who profit by the ignorance and want of others was obvious. He called his handful of followers to the greatest venture ever launched, the destruction of all the powers of evil. "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what will I, if it is already kindled? . . . Think ye that I am come to give peace upon the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For there shall be henceforth five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. They shall be divided father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against mother." [24] "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." [25] "But take heed to yourselves: for they shall deliver you up to councils; and in synagogues shall ye be beaten; and before governors and kings shall ye

[23] It may be objected that this thought of a decision "once and for all" is in opposition to what was said in a previous chapter on progress in the life of the kingdom. The answer is that Jesus certainly thought of individuals as settling the ultimate aim or objective of life in a basic decision, but he did not think that thereby we became perfect. Obviously there will be habits to be brought into line, attitudes to be developed on the basis of love, graces of the spirit to be ever acquired, etc.

[24] Luke 12: 49-53.

[25] Mark 8: 34.

stand for my sake. . . . And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." [26] He himself led the way. "A disciple is not above his master, nor a servant above his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household." [27] To one who expressed a willingness to follow him, Jesus had to reply that he must remember that the Son of Man had no place to lay his head.[28] He was called upon to endure privation, to face constant criticism and almost daily attack, to have treachery enter his intimate group of disciples, and finally to die on a hill outside the gates of Jerusalem. He well knew the result of loyalty to the kingdom.

In the face of this inevitable conflict is it any occasion of surprise to find that Jesus placed emphasis on courage and strength of purpose? For courage is vital to the service of love that he intended. Without it, no matter how benevolent an individual may be, there will result only timidity and ineffectiveness. He had no use for the fearful and cowardly. He called only for great souls, or rather for those who would rise to the greatness of his challenge. Over and over again in the Gospels we read, "Fear not," "Fear not." When he said "love," he did not mean weak sentimentality or a piety which represents an escape from the hazards and ardors of life. It was a thing that had in it the strong passion of the old prophets of Israel, a zeal that counted no task too difficult and no stronghold of evil too powerful to be attacked.

[26] Mark 13:9 f.
[27] Matthew 10:24, 25.
[28] Luke 9:58.

In a Christian, weakness and fear are a sin; courage is a fundamental Christian virtue.

But we must ask, What is the basis of this courage of which we have been speaking? Is it simply physical hardness, sheer bravado, or stoic fortitude that endures without complaint? Reckless courage that dares without ground or reason we rightly reckon to be wrong and foolish. Jesus had a very definite basis for the courage which he required. It goes back to his religious conviction, to his belief in God as active and ruling in the universe.

That Jesus did so think of God as actively working for righteousness we have already seen. How could one be afraid who realized that great fact? We are fellow-workers with God. The universe is on the side of righteousness. "If God be for us who can be against us?" [29]—that is the basis of Jesus' strength. To his disciples growing timid as to their powers of presenting their cause he declared, "It is not ye who speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you." [30] When they were dismayed at the ripeness of the harvest and the scarcity of workers, he reminded them of God's part in the work, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest." [31] God is actively at work for righteousness; we labor not in our strength alone—that is the way Jesus regarded the problem. "So is the kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how.

[29] Romans 8:31.
[30] Matthew 10:20.
[31] Matthew 9:38 and Luke 10:2.

The earth beareth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." [32]

And not only should men have courage and dismiss their fears because God is our helper and strength, but also because we may be absolutely sure of his ultimate victory. The mustard seed is tiny, but it grows into the great tree. The leaven is small in proportion, but it changes the whole lump. God not only rules, but he shall rule completely—that we have seen is the vital element in the thought of the future kingdom. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." [33]

Herein is the source and ground of Jesus' confidence and courage. We see again how his practical ethical teaching turns back to and rests upon his thought of God. We usually call this Jesus' teaching of faith in God. He constantly urged greater faith upon his disciples. "If only ye had faith like a mustard seed!" [34] He saw that the chief bar to greatness of effort was that they did not have sufficient confidence in goodness, which is only another way of saying sufficient confidence in God. They did not and we do not really believe that goodness can be made real in life, that God's kingdom is really coming. Hence we never let go of ourselves, we do not trust the issue. In the working of all his miracles of healing Jesus saw this constantly illustrated. Belief that the good could and would happen was indispensable. "Have faith in God," that was an attitude

[32] Mark 4:26 f.
[33] Luke 12:32.
[34] Matthew 17:20 and Luke 17:6.

of life which was necessary for the release of the latent powers of one's soul.

There are other elements of this trust and faith in God which we shall have to reserve for later treatment. Just here the important thing to observe is that it is the foundation for that whole courageous activity of loving service to which Jesus called his hearers.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. What attitude is implied by Christian humility toward the faults of others? Toward one's own virtues? Does Christian humility mean an unwillingness to accept responsibilities?
2. Show how the humble spirit is necessary in all scientific and scholarly work? What is the effect in these fields of the opposite spirit?
3. What is sincerity? Wherein lies the grave danger of pretense and insincerity?
4. State in your own words the two types of courage described in the text. What is the difference between Christian courage and recklessness?
5. What is the foundation for the courage that Jesus demanded? Compare it in this respect with Jesus' definition of goodness.
6. Discuss the relation of love, humility, sincerity and courage. Are they separate and distinct "virtues," or do they demand each other's presence for their own completion?

CHAPTER IX

THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT IN PRACTICE—MONEY MATTERS

THUS far we have been discussing a number of general topics, the meaning of the kingdom, what is goodness, the character of love, the necessity of sincerity, etc. As Jesus handled them, these were vivid and vital realities. Nevertheless, there is always a danger for us that they will remain general and abstract, "qualities" to be sought, rather than actual experiences which we shall relive daily. Because of this danger it will be well for us to consider certain very practical situations which people have always had to face, and to ask how Jesus taught that men should act in these circumstances and in the face of these problems. The first of these which I have chosen is the ever-present problem of property.

Money is more than a number of hard, cold pieces of metal. It is the command of food and clothing and houses and horses and pictures and boats and all other things that people crave. Many of these things are necessary for living; all of them bring comfort and ease and a certain kind of satisfaction. So we constantly struggle to seize as much as possible of the stock of the world's goods. In that struggle it is the familiar story that a few are outstandingly successful, and these make the rules for the continuation of the struggle. Thus custom and law come in to aid differences in natural ability in widening the gap between rich and poor. In the United States,

for example, fifteen per cent of the people control eighty-five per cent of the wealth, and yet, being a new country, the wealth is more evenly distributed here than in most other lands.

I

In Palestine, where Jesus lived, this contrast of wealth and poverty was very obvious. The New Testament bears testimony, the more eloquent because indirect, of the presence of the poor. The ordinary food of Jesus' hearers was bread and fish. Meat as food is not once mentioned in the Gospels![1] The poor are frequently mentioned. The number of very small coins which have been preserved from that period show the poverty of the majority of the people. The predominant occupations were agriculture and sheep raising, and poor soil combined with primitive processes of farming to give scanty crops. Add to all this the fact that the country had been drained for generations by the taxations of foreign overlords. Still, in contrast to the multitudes of poor, there were people of wealth. Jesus watched "many rich" as they cast gifts into the treasury. Josephus and the Mishna both speak of wealthy officials and citizens.

We must, moreover, remember that Jesus, living in this situation, was one of the laborers. He was in all probability the eldest son of a widowed mother and there were at least six children younger than himself. When he began his public work his followers were all men of limited means. At different times in his brief life he must have known the pressure of want. This was not

[1] Cf. Dickey: *The Constructive Revolution of Jesus*, p. 124.

because there was not enough food and clothing to go around in Palestine, but because a few people had secured a disproportionate part of the supply. It would not be surprising then if we found Jesus addressing himself specifically to the economic problem which was acute then as now, denouncing the situation in Palestine and making proposals for a new system in which all injustice would be done away.

Just such a denunciation and such proposals many people think Jesus gave. "Christ was the first great socialist"; "Jesus was a revolutionist"; "If anyone preached to-day as he did, he would be arrested"; "Christianity was a vast economic revolution"; "The Sermon on the Mount is really a treatise on political economy"—these are only a few quotations expressing this conviction.[2] It is pointed out that he declared it more difficult for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom.[3] He told the rich young ruler, "If thou wouldst be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor."[4] Does not this denounce wealth? He said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth."[5] Does not that forbid private property? In Luke's Gospel we read, "Blessed are ye poor! . . . Woe unto you rich!"[6] There are several parables that point in the same direction, notably the parable of the rich man and Lazarus[7] and the story of the rich man who said to his soul, "Take thine ease."[8] Finally we have in Luke

[2] For a good collection of these see Peabody's *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, p. 63 ff.

[3] Mark 10:25.

[4] Matthew 19:21.

[5] Matthew 6:19.

[6] Luke 6:20, 24.

[7] Luke 16:19 f.

[8] Luke 12:16 f.

14:33 the specific and sweeping injunction: "So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." That certainly seems to sweep away any Christian participation in the present economic system.

Before passing to the discussion of this question, it will be instructive to notice that the exact opposite to this condemnation of wealth has frequently been presented as the teaching of Jesus—namely, that he offers material rewards and blessings to those who follow him. "Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." [9] No man has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother . . . or lands . . . for my sake, and the gospel's sake, but shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and lands with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." [10] These have been the texts for many an assertion that Christianity brings material blessings to the faithful. Nothing better illustrates than these various views the vagueness and uncertainty of our knowledge of the mind of Jesus; nor could there be any better illustration of the necessity of studying each particular saying in the light of the whole tenor of his teaching.

What did Jesus teach about money and possessions? He certainly did not carefully leave the subject alone and, as the phrase goes, "stick to religion." Did he offer a new economic system on the grounds that love is incompatible with private ownership and hence all such personal possessions should be given away?

[9] Matthew 6:33. [10] Mark 10:29.

I think we may quickly dispose of this question. In spite of all the quotations given above which condemn wealth or praise poverty, we can safely say that Jesus was not opposed to private ownership, *as such,* or to the normal process of making a living. He himself earned a living in early life and probably supported by his toil his widowed mother and sisters and younger brothers. Later on, when he and his disciples traveled over Galilee and Judea, we are told that they had a money bag from which their frugal needs were met.[11] Luke tells us further that there were certain women who at one time ministered to him and his disciples of their substance,[12] which fact would show, of course, that Jesus respected and used the private means of these devoted women. The homes of Peter in Capernaum and of Mary and Martha near Jerusalem he used both for his work and his rest, and there is no hint of a denunciation of such ownership of houses. But perhaps the most instructive passage is the story of Jesus and Zacchæus. This publican, in the enthusiasm of his new conviction, said, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have wrongfully exacted aught of any man, I restore him fourfold." [13] That Jesus had no objection to ownership as such is shown by his reply, "To-day is salvation come to this house," although we notice that Zacchæus by no means gave away his entire fortune. As to the injunction to the rich young man to give away his fortune, its sequel shows that we must not try to make it a universal rule. Jesus looked around and said, "How hardly shall they that

[11] John 13:29.
[12] Luke 8:3.
[13] Luke 19:8.

have riches enter into the kingdom of God. . . . With men it is impossible, but not with God." [14]

All of which comes back to this: that love is not incompatible with personal ownership. A home in which children are to be reared and parents protected, tools which make possible serviceable labor in the work of the world, clothing against the winter's cold, and food for the day of famine—all these are in ordinary situations but the expression of a loving spirit. Jesus never denounced "taking thought for the morrow" in spite of the erroneous translation in Matthew 6:34 (a passage which should read as the Revised Version has it, "Be not anxious for the morrow"). He recognized in many a parable the value of honest work and he commended the care of aged parents and the love of little children. He was not so blind as to condemn the necessary method of expressing such love and care.

II

What then was Jesus' teaching on the subject of riches? The number and character of his statements about riches and the rich show that he had deep convictions on the subject. What was his positive teaching in this realm that comes close home to us all?

1. Jesus laid down the fundamental proposition that there must be no rival in the heart of the individual to the rule of God. He saw clearly how love of money tended to become the dominant desire of life. Men get in the race, and the competition for wealth makes its pur-

[14] Mark 10:23, 27.

suit the more keen. The power which it brings makes it desirable even apart from the pleasant things it will purchase. Thus possessions begin to loom larger in our thought than obedience to the will of God. We think in mercenary terms, we crave material ends, we admire those who succeed in laying up riches. Thus, even unconsciously, the things of God come to take second place. Mammon—which is only the Aramaic word for riches —comes to be the object of worship.

But there is no membership in the kingdom of God without singleness of heart. We have seen how absolutely fundamental this is with Jesus. There must be no compromise as to the aim of life. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." [15] Why? Because serving God is a thing of the whole direction and dedication of the life, and the life cannot be dedicated to two different ultimate objectives. Unless that decision as to the aim of life be clearly faced, there will result ineffectiveness of effort, uncertainty of action, inner conflict and confusion. That wholeness of life in loving service becomes impossible.

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Ye cannot serve God and any other competitive interest. The strongest statement of this fundamental principle Jesus gave not in connection with money matters; he chose instead—it must have been consciously—the noblest human devotion, love of family. "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and

[15] Matthew 6: 24.

wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."[16] The meaning of this verse is clear. Not even the noblest devotion to this individual or this small group can be elevated above the demands of the kingdom. The words which follow in the text drive home that thought: "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, doth not first sit down and count the cost? . . . Or what king going to war doth not consider the force of his enemy? . . . So therefore whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."[17] If love of parents, wife, and children must not come before devotion to the kingdom, is it any wonder that he refused to allow that primacy to the pursuit of wealth? "Seek ye first the kingdom of God"—nothing must come before that.

This is the first principle in Jesus' teaching on riches. And it was because he saw Mammon constantly usurping God's place that he declared it to be such a danger to the soul. The man seeking wealth is likely to adopt what Professor Dickey has recently called "a rival salvation."[18] He comes to believe that his main satisfaction and security in life are to be obtained by wealth. He begins to trust in his money. The objects of his interest become material things. But "after all these things the Gentiles seek"—*i. e.,* this is all paganism. The real source of trust and confidence should be God, and the main concern of life should be his will. The inadequacy and impermanence of such trust in material things become

[16] Luke 14:26.

[17] Luke 14:28-33.

[18] Dickey: *The Constructive Revolution of Jesus,* p. 131. I am indebted to Prof. Dickey throughout all this discussion.

clearly revealed in the hour of death. There was a rich man once who filled his barns to overflowing and said, "Soul, take thine ease." But that night God said, "Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee." And Jesus concluded the story with the warning, "So is everyone who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." [19] It was because he saw riches crowding out in so many instances that "richness toward God" that he felt the love of money to be such a danger to the soul. Not necessarily so, but actually he saw wealth in many cases making men arrogant and proud, self-confident and worldly-minded.

2. So closely associated with the above as to make separate treatment difficult is a second principle which Jesus laid down. Seeking first the kingdom of God means, as we have seen, adopting an attitude of love toward our fellow-men. It assumes that men are more valuable than money, and that the claims of human beings must never be sacrificed for anything material. The first principle stated above might be put, The rule of God above riches; the second principle, Men are more valuable than money.

Here again Jesus saw the pursuit of wealth as a special danger. The choice between personal profit and greater service to humanity is one that tests character most severely. There is an adage strangely familiar in Christian America—I dare say we have all heard it—"Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindermost." It is the exact antithesis of Jesus' "He that is greatest among you shall be the servant of all." To extract a purely

[19] Luke 12: 16-21.

personal profit from human need, a profit that in no way returns in further service, is quite obviously unchristian. And yet the process goes on all around us. To quote Professor Dickey again, "The whole business of laying up money in the midst of human need, Jesus implies, corrupts the soul." The Christian spirit declares that human values are above all monetary returns, and it will gladly sacrifice a chance for fortune on behalf of the health, happiness, and spiritual development of the men and women affected by the occupation. The law of supply and demand is no answer to the questions raised by a Christian conscience. Nor is a lawyer's opinion on the legality of a certain course of action. A corner on the wheat market, a reduction in the production of life's necessities in order to increase the price, such control of the tools of production that laborers are made to compete with each other for the chance to work—these and other practices may be legal, but they put money above the lives of the men and women who suffer from them. The practical application of this principle means that the first question a Christian should ask would be not, "How much will the profit be?" but "How will this affect the lives of the men and women and children related to this business or this profession?"

This conception of the unique value of human life is fundamental with Jesus. It goes back to his teaching that all men are the objects of the divine love. "The hairs of your head are numbered, fear not therefore." "How much then is a man of more value than a sheep!" "Behold the birds of the heaven! . . . Your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not of more value than they?" In all of these sayings the unique worth of human beings

is clearly in mind. They are the objects of the love and care of God. Beware then of injuring them for the sake of some material consideration! "Whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe to stumble, it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the sea." [20]

And yet for the sake of money Jesus saw men constantly crippling and starving their fellows. Not only the acquisition of it, but its centralization in a few hands, is likely to prove a temptation. We are accustomed to say that great wealth is good neither for the possessor nor for the dependent poor. Mastery over the lives and fortunes of others, which wealth involves, is a grave responsibility. The danger is that it will breed hardness of spirit and lack of sympathy. On the other hand, those made dependent are likely to become bitter and resentful. The "class struggle," which seems almost inevitably to spring up, arrays both groups against each other. In the conflict the rights of men as such, the generous emotions of both parties, are likely to be wiped out, and hatred and antagonism take their place. No wonder that Jesus saw in avarice a vital danger to the soul. "Take heed that ye keep yourselves from all covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things that he possesseth" [21]—that word comes to us in the midst of our modern economic strife, calling to us to disarm. We are blind; we are fighting for the wrong things. Possessions are not the primary aim of life. The true values are love, peace, coöperation, friendship, the joy of labor, a sense of mission. The kingdom of God is brother-

[20] Matthew 18:6. [21] Luke 12:15.

hood. Property must always be subordinated to the rights of personality. This principle is so far-reaching that we have only just begun to appreciate its significance. In the mind of Jesus there are no property rights that can stand against the value of persons.

3. We might add a third principle in Jesus' teaching on wealth: that all occupations and professions should be carried on from the motive of public service, and not solely from the motive of personal profit. That is, of course, but another phase of the principle of love discussed above. But its application to the economic world has never been made. So regarded, no business would be run for its owners only, but to supply the needs of the community; no farmer would plow for his small financial gain, but to feed a hungry world; no doctor or lawyer would practice for himself alone, but to heal and help those in distress. So regarded, every task becomes sacred. With such ideals, work is a precious thing and must not be applied to endeavors that do not minister to the physical or spiritual needs of men. Even the humblest task so regarded has its own glory. There are no "respected occupations" except those which serve the more. "He who would be greatest must become the minister of all." [22]

These are the positive principles that Jesus would apply to economics. He had no neat scheme of economic reform. This is shown by his refusal on two occasions to take the rôle of financial legislator. They came to him on one occasion and asked about the right of Rome to

[22] Mark 10:44; Matthew 20:27; Luke 9:48, etc.

collect taxes.[23] He refused to be drawn into a definition of the limits of Church and State, or the rights of the State in the economic sphere. On the other occasion, a man came asking that Jesus compel his brother to divide an inheritance fairly. Here was his chance surely, if he had wished to set up the specific rules of how property should change hands and how wealth should be divided! Instead, his reply went behind the details of the case to the motive which he saw was in the man's heart and which was far worse than any injustice he had received in the division of the estate: "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? And he said, Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness." [24] He steadily refused to become a lawmaker or economic expert.

Yet these three principles cry out against any system or practice that exalts wealth above humanity, that makes the desire for selfish profit the foundation of the economic order. They are more needed to-day than they were in Palestine then, because we have organized life so that we do not see the results of many of our actions and cannot count on natural kindness and generosity to the degree that was possible when most transactions were face to face and carried results which were immediately visible.

III

But if these principles be given the right of way, I think we may say that so far as Jesus was concerned

[23] Mark 12: 14. [24] Luke 12:13.

the question of wealth becomes an indifferent one. He had no class prejudice. We find him dining with wealthy Pharisees as well as with the poor and the outcasts. As already remarked, at least one of the women who ministered unto him of their substance was a woman of prominence, and all of them were evidently people of competence if not actually wealthy. Jesus emphasized personality and not possessions. A certain centurion he praised as having more faith than had been found in Israel, quite irrespective of his being a person put in authority and rich enough to have "given a synagogue unto our people." [25] On the other hand, the incident of the widow who cast her mite into the treasury is instructive. The size of the donations did not excite him. It was the personal expression that went into the gift. This is the principle that runs through his teaching on wealth. Jesus thus spiritualized the whole economic problem. Money, property, and the like are but tools or implements of useful living, but the vital thing is the kind of personality, the character of life which uses them, and the effect that use has on other lives. The spirit of man and its claims must take precedence over all material considerations.

Wealth used according to the control of these principles becomes indifferent to the owner as well. It ceases to be an occasion of personal glorification or a means of mastery over others. It becomes a trust, and the owner a steward. To him who obeys Jesus' law of love, wealth simply affords an opportunity.

[25] Luke 7: 5.

To such a one trying to make the kingdom of God first in life, Jesus said that wealth would mean two things.

1. It would mean an opportunity to serve humanity. "Whosoever shall give a cup of cold water only to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple shall not lose his reward," [26] he said at one time. The Good Samaritan not only bound up the wounds of the man who was bleeding, but going on to the inn was able with his means to provide for him even after his own departure.[27] The parable of Dives clothed in purple and fine linen and feasting sumptuously finds its point in the thought of how much that rich man could have done for the beggar at his door.[28] He who has means has not only his own life to give in service, but the thought and labor of many men stored up in the form of wealth. Love will rejoice in such means of service. In Palestine, where life was simple and social relations were for the most part face to face, such service usually took the form of personal charity, and Jesus regarded all such sincere acts as a fine privilege. "Sell all that ye have and give alms; make for yourselves purses which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not." [29]

2. But it is difficult to regard one's wealth as a means to the service and help of other people. Jesus knew this well. All his warnings against the danger of riches go back to that fact. Hence he has one other thing to say to the man who finds means at his disposal. Just as the abuse of the personal and spiritual which is bound up in

[26] Matthew 10:42.
[27] Luke 10:35.
[28] Luke 16:19.
[29] Luke 12:33.

money reveals the unrighteous heart and brings God's condemnation, so the right use of wealth brings in its train the development of character and the approval of God. This is the theme of practically all of Luke 16, which begins with the parable of the unjust steward. This man used wealth which was not his to make friends for himself against the day when his lord would take away his stewardship. "The sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light," is Jesus' comment on the story he had told. "And I say, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it shall fail they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles." [30] When he says, "Make ye friends," etc., we must remember that he is continuing the general picture of the parable. The main thought is clear. Just as the sons of this world use wealth to prepare for their future days, so should the sons of the kingdom. The right use of the mammon of unrighteousness can bring one into "the eternal tabernacles." Wealth is simply a trust. Its stewardship is a responsibility whose proper execution wins God's own approval. In itself it may be of little moment; in its use it may win for us the greatest rewards God has to give. The chapter from which the above quotation was made goes on with this thought becoming ever clearer. "He that is faithful in little is faithful in much; he that is unrighteous in little is unrighteous also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to you the true riches?" [31]

[30] Luke 16: 8 f. [31] Luke 16: 10 f.

TOPICS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. What passages are sometimes quoted to show that Jesus forbade private property? How would you answer such a contention?
2. State the three principles given in this study which Jesus taught should govern the acquisition and use of wealth.
3. Can you show that these three principles are in fact different phases of one of them? State this fundamental principle.
4. Can the acquisition of wealth in the wrong way be justified on the grounds that it will be generously used?
5. In the light of Jesus' teaching, on what basis should one choose an occupation? Do you think that every occupation should be entered with a sense of the divine call, or should that apply to the ministry only?
6. Show that the possession of wealth, rightly considered, is a responsibility and a testing rather than an opportunity for personal gratification.

CHAPTER X

THE CHRISTIAN SPIRIT IN PRACTICE—DOMESTIC LIFE

THE family, at least in all modern life, is the unit of society. More burdens are carried by it, more is expected of it, than of any other institution. It determines the lives of its members to a greater degree than any other factor or group of factors. Its obligations rest upon us more immediately and are more pressing than any others. It generates more devotion, and on the other hand more bitterness if things go wrong. It molds the lives of its members. It is of such primary importance in the practical conduct of life that we do well to ask ourselves in this, as in the practical sphere of money, what it means to follow Jesus' standard.

I

Now here probably more than anywhere else in this little book it is essential to remember the attitude of contemporary Judaism. The synagogue regarded the family with the utmost appreciation and reverence. Quotations from the Old Testament, from the Apocrypha, from the sayings of the rabbis on this point are so abundant as to make it difficult only to decide which ones to quote. The verse, "Houses and riches are an inheritance from fathers: but a prudent wife is from the Lord" [1] is

[1] Proverbs 19: 14.

typical of much of the content of Proverbs. The divine sanction for marriage went back to the days of creation when God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." [2] One rabbi went so far as to say that "God sitteth in heaven arranging marriages." "At marriage all sins are forgiven," is a piquant saying of another. Jewish youths were supposed to be married by the age of twenty, and sometimes their failure so to be called forth active assistance from the congregation! One of the duties of parents was to find good husbands and wives for their children.[3]

So also in the case of children. Every reader of the Old Testament is familiar with the sadness of the childless household. The stories of Hannah, of Rebecca, and of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, come readily to mind. Over and over again we catch phrases that reflect the pride and joy of the Hebrew parents in their children, particularly if they were boys. Ben Sirach found it necessary to warn his readers against caring too much for their sons.[4] "He that maketh too much of his son shall bind up his wounds." [5] "Desire not a multitude of unprofitable children, neither delight in ungodly sons." [6] A saying from the Talmud reads, "These four reckon as dead—the blind, the leper, the poor, and the childless." On the other hand, affection for and

[2] Genesis 2:18.

[3] Ecclesiasticus 7:25.

[4] Ben Sirach was a devout and patriotic Jew who wrote about 175 B.C. He was a teacher of the youth and a typical "wise man." His book, Ecclesiasticus, or, The Wisdom of Ben Sirach, reads much like Proverbs.

[5] Ecclesiasticus 30:7.

[6] Ecclesiasticus 16:1.

obedience to parents in the strictest degree were enjoined upon the sons and daughters. "Honor thy father and thy mother"—that was bred in the bone by many a precept and by constant example.

The Jews were conspicuous in the ancient world for the fidelity with which marriage relations were preserved. The prophets and the law and the whole educational system by which the law was taught to the people inculcated purity and condemned the adulterer. That fact adds more point to the repeated use of that term to describe Israel's faithlessness to Jehovah. We see this high moral standard reflected in the writings of St. Paul: "It is actually reported that there is fornication among you, and such as is not found even among the Gentiles."[7] That unconscious comparison of the standard among Jews and among the Gentiles was not an expression of mere race prejudice. It was largely because of its high moral standard in this and several other respects that Judaism was winning converts all over the Roman Empire, even before the birth of Christianity.

Thus through all Jewish life there ran this family emphasis. It was natural in its simpler aspects to a nation that had grown out of ancient tribal elements. The family was the unit. If a census was to be taken, it should be done according to the old family lines. The genealogy of the people was carefully kept, both because of pride in the family stock and because of the necessity of proving membership in certain families to serve in the priestly occupations. Local affairs seem to have been pretty much run by the heads of the great houses. Patri-

[7] 1 Corinthians 5:1.

archal and hereditary ideas governed in the political realm rather than anything like democratic conceptions.

But there was one dark spot in all this to which we will return shortly—the position of women. The old conception of wives as property lingered from the earlier days of the desert. Several illustrations will suffice. First note the difference in what constituted technical adultery in the case of a man and of a woman. In the case of a wife, she committed adultery if she was unfaithful, no matter who might be her partner. But a husband was not guilty of this crime unless his act was committed with a woman married to another man; for then he violated the other man's rights. In the laws of divorce the same attitude comes out. A husband could divorce his wife at will. "If she find no favor in his eyes" is the language of Deuteronomy 24: 1. Hillel, the great rabbi of the first century before Christ, said, "Even if she spoiled his food," though the language here may not have been intended literally. But a wife could not divorce her husband for any reason whatever. Upon certain extreme offenses she gained the right to appeal to the local courts for release. But even then all the court could do was to compel the guilty husband to divorce the innocent wife!

Just in the period when Jesus lived many influences were coming into Palestine to change the whole set of attitudes and customs built up by the Jews toward the marriage institution. There was a sect called the Essenes who forbade marriage to its members as something venial. Greek and Roman influences were everywhere in the country tending to break down the strictness with which the Jews regarded all sex relations. One public example,

and this in high life, is familiar to us all. Herod Antipas, "that fox," [8] had married his brother Philip's wife, an offense to Jewish morals that John the Baptist did not hesitate to condemn. In Jewish circles ideas were shifting. The famous rabbinical schools of Hillel and Shammai had engaged in a warm controversy over the legitimate grounds for divorce, Hillel, however, winning out in favor of the traditional freedom for the husband. Lastly, the Roman occupation of the land and the removal of all capital executions from the hands of the Jewish authorities had made it impossible to carry out, even had they wished it, the Pentateuchal law of death for the crime of adultery. Thus many influences were at work to change Jewish ideas in this sphere.

II

Turning to Jesus' sayings, we find him expressing most beautifully the finer aspects of the synagogue's teaching on the family. The family is the noblest institution on earth. The relations which exist between its members he makes the type and symbol of the kingdom of God. God is not like a priest, or king, or judge, or artist; he is like a father of children. That means that in Jesus' thought the family had produced the noblest figure on earth, the character most divine—parenthood. Furthermore we saw that when he spoke of the ideal relation between men and women of the kingdom he turned to the family for his word—they should be like brothers and sisters. "For whosoever shall do the will of God,

[8] Luke 13:32.

the same is my brother and sister and mother." [9] "One is your teacher, and ye are all brethren." [10]

The claims of the family he defended against all that would usurp their place. He was not always a quiet teacher, self-contained and expressing repose in word and bearing. Occasionally he flamed forth in indignant rebuke. One of those occasions was when he spoke of how the religious casuistry of the hour condoned or excused those who neglected the care of their own parents. "Moses said, 'Honor thy father and thy mother. . . .' But ye say, 'If a man shall say to his father or his mother, That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is Corban, that is to say, Given to God, ye no longer suffer him to do aught for his father or his mother: making void the word of God by your tradition." [11] Toward children he had the tenderest sympathy. Not only should they be loved and helped; they should be imitated,[12] "for of such is the kingdom of God." It were better for one "if a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were thrown into the sea rather than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble." [13]

This interest in the children who came about him must have gone back to an earlier time. Reference has been made to the probability that Joseph died early and the care of the family devolved on the young shoulders of Jesus. Mary's was a household teeming with children,

[9] Mark 3:35.
[10] Matthew 23:8.
[11] Mark 7:10 f.
[12] Mark 10:14 f.
[13] Luke 17:2. The term "little ones" in this verse probably included also adults of that "childlike" character that Jesus praised, as well as those actually young in years.

six, seven, maybe eight of them.[14] When later in his teaching he speaks of the children who come asking for bread and sometimes even for a fish,[15] of children playing games in the market place and sometimes in sulky mood refusing to play,[16] of people who come to borrow after it is dark and the children have finally been all gotten to bed,[17] of brothers that are quick to suspect partiality and have to be reasoned out of their moodiness,[18] it sounds very much as if he is speaking from experience. As Glover says, "Are we to think that the tenderness of Jesus came to him by a miracle when he was about thirty years of age? Must we not think it was growing up in that house and in that shop? Or did he never tell a story—he who tells them so charmingly—till he wanted parables?" [19]

But we have slipped into speculation about that home of his own in those quiet years before he went out to listen to John preaching in the wilderness. What about marriage itself? That is usually the heart of the question. Did he appreciate that? Or did he regard marriage as a concession to human frailty and an impediment to the fullest service of God? [20]

The problem of sex and its relations has always been difficult for religion to deal with. He who exalts the spiritual is likely to deny the bodily. Spirit must rule over body, therefore the body must be conquered. Thus has asceticism ever dogged the heels of religion. And where this has been avoided an opposite foe has tended

[14] Mark 6:3.
[15] Matthew 7:9, 10.
[16] Matthew 11:16, 17.
[17] Luke 11:7.
[18] Luke 15:28-32.
[19] *The Jesus of History*, p. 29 f.
[20] Cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7, 9, 32, 33.

to appear—license in the name of religion. The bacchanalia of ancient times, the practices at various temples, the aberrations of sects and cults in modern days, testify to the danger. Sanity is never so well tested as here. What is spirituality? Something otherworldly, opposed to the normal and the healthy? Something that would take us out of life? Or is it something that suffuses normal life processes with a meaning and a light that does not come from the earth of which we are made?

Fortunately we have an explicit statement as to what Jesus thought. It is one of those passages of critical value for getting at the mind of Jesus. They had asked him about divorce and Jesus gave in answer his whole attitude toward the relation of men and women. "From the beginning of the creation, male and female made he them. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife; and the twain shall become one flesh, so that they are no more twain, but one flesh." [21]

The thought here needs little comment. In Jesus' opinion marriage was an institution of God corresponding to facts of creation. Men and women supplement one another. Standing alone they are incomplete. The merging of lives together was God's all-wise purpose and intent. The two shall become one flesh. Marriage is the completion of the process of creation; in entering therein we coöperate with God. It is not an accident, not a concession to human weakness, but the final divine gift of completeness of life.

Jesus was no ascetic. The kingdom of God is not a

[21] Mark 10:6 f.

removal from life. It means carrying the mind of God into all of this normal healthy life which he has given us.

"Male and female created he them; therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife; and the twain shall become one flesh." In higher terms than this no one can speak of marriage. Husband and wife have lost their lives to find a higher life, have died individually to find a fuller life together.

All this appreciation of marriage and the family, shown especially in the use of family terms to describe the relations of the kingdom of God, is what we would naturally expect from the principles that Jesus has previously laid down. He declared that love was the highest attribute of man and that it should be made universal. Naturally he would admire and strengthen the institution that creates love, that binds its members together in mutual devotion and service. His own language makes one quite safe in saying that Jesus' whole teaching of life and duty might be described as simply the extension of the family limits so as to include all mankind.

III

This reverence for the family was, as I have said, one of the primary tenets of Judaism and was regularly taught in the synagogues. It was one of the things the rabbis emphasized. This is undoubtedly the reason that we have no more pointed and explicit sayings by Jesus on the subject of family devotion and care. It wasn't necessary in Palestine. Thus Jesus' attitude comes out indirectly, for the most part in connection with what he has to say on other subjects.

Explicitly and directly, Jesus rather seems interested in qualifying the current Jewish conception of the family. While he said that parenthood best represented the character of God and that brotherhood was the essence of the kingdom, he set himself very explicitly to teach that one's family must always be kept in a secondary position. The chief object of man's interest and the scope of his endeavor must be to do God's will. One's own family must never be exalted above that. When family ties interfere with doing the will of God, they must be sacrificed. He saw a danger to the fullest development of the moral character in an excessive devotion to one small group. The claim of the family must be subordinated to the demands of the general good.

How we would like to make it otherwise! If we could only confine our unselfishness and altruism to members of our own family! All of us would be willing to do that. As Jesus said with stinging force on another occasion, "If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?" [22] The one who seeks the kingdom of God will make family devotion but a stage or step in the service of all men. The warmer, closer affection of the smaller, more intimate group will always be kept in perfect harmony with the rights and needs of others outside. The kingdom of God must come first, and if it be made so, the claims and duties and affections of family life will fall into their proper place.

This was not an abstract academic matter with Jesus,

[22] Matthew 5:46, 47.

nor is it with us. He had to give up his own home for the sake of his mission, and—if the wording of Mark 3:31 f. be properly translated—carried on his work against family criticism and obstruction. He saw the necessity of laying down as the first condition of discipleship that men must leave father and mother and brethren and lands and houses for his sake. There are some sayings in the Gospels which seem almost harsh in their insistence that the family is subordinate to the kingdom of God. "And another also said, I will follow thee, Lord; but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house. But Jesus said to him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. . . . And he said to another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But he said, Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but go thou and publish abroad the kingdom of God."[23] "If any man cometh after me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."[24] "Think not that I came to send peace upon the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."[25]

The thought throughout all of these is very clear. It is summed up in Matthew 10:37 f.: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy

[23] Luke 9:61 f., and 59 f.
[24] Luke 14:26.
[25] Matthew 10:34 f.

of me. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me." The loyalty to the highest must be supreme. No man or woman can enter the kingdom of God with its sweeping vision of service to all of life who makes the demands of that kingdom subservient to the desire or pleasure of some individual or group of individuals. "Even the Gentiles do the same." Devotion to this group or that group is most worthy, but it must take its place in the light of the good of the whole. The opposite is the doctrine of "My party, right or wrong," "My country, right or wrong," "My own family, right or wrong." Jesus condemned all such narrowing of the kingdom.

And in so subordinating the family he lifted it, of course, to a higher level. It becomes in his hands an agent ministering to the very highest ideal of life. The affections which it generates sweep outside its own bounds to become effective for the needs of the world. Family devotion and loyalty become filled with a new meaning, and are made the agent and vehicle of the noblest objectives.[26]

IV

We have left out thus far the question of divorce and what Jesus said about it. It is in some of these sayings that we see most clearly the depth and power of his conception of the family.

The Jewish custom and law have already been described. They sanctioned and always had sanctioned divorce by the husband with the utmost freedom. There

[26] Cf. Scott, *The Ethical Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 96, 98.

must only be a written certificate given to the wife which was evidence of her right to remarry. Of course the rabbis built up in time various regulations which ameliorated somewhat the cruelties of such a system, and no doubt also the great majority of Jewish marriages were broken only by the death of one of the parties. But in spite of all this, the evil was there and did not escape Jesus' keen sense for moral and spiritual values.

The passages dealing with this subject are the following: Mark 10:2-12 and the parallel passage Matthew 19:3-9; Matthew 5:31-32; Luke 16:18; and finally 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

If we read these carefully, we shall observe that the wording of the sayings is not always the same. The fundamental thought is expressed in the several passages with differences of detail. As a result it is easy to fall into debate as to this or that feature of this teaching. For example, did Jesus forbid divorce or rather remarriage? What is the relation of the uncompromising form of the utterances in Mark and Luke to the commands in Matthew which allow one exception to the principle? We could debate much about such questions. But through all of these passages there runs one clear, strong, certain note. In the face of contemporary practice, Jesus declared that marriage was a union and not a contract, that it was permanent and not subject to the inclination of the moment, that it was the blending of two lives, not a temporary association.

Nowhere else does Jesus so elevate marriage and the family as here. Husband and wife belong together. Even though he allowed separation—as Paul certainly under-

stood him to allow [27]—they still belong to each other. The bond is so sacred and intimate that it holds even though they be separated from each other. Whether we like it or not, that seems to be Jesus' teaching.

We must remember that Jesus was speaking to a people among whom divorce was easy and had been so from time immemorial. Its sanction was to be found in the Old Testament. Furthermore, he spoke to a group among whom tyrannical power was possessed by the husband. Hence the necessity for laying down absolutely and unconditionally the one principle on which the family can be built, the fundamental recognition of the permanency of marriage.

That is the important thing. We must think and act and plan on the assumption that marriage is essentially a union of lives for life. It should be entered only with that thought and intention. Its problems should be met and considered with no other idea in mind. A separation of husband and wife is basically wrong. That is undoubtedly Jesus' thought.

This was because he had another solution for the discords of family life. We small souls have nothing to say of these except to let the man and woman separate. Jesus believed in facing wrong and eliminating it, using the only weapons effective in such warfare. We must not read his teaching on divorce alone as if he simply overlooked the homes where there is no harmony or peace. We must remember that these sayings on divorce are addressed to those who are trying to live in accordance with the laws of the kingdom. Accordingly, if the family

[27] 1 Corinthians 7: 10, 11.

unhappiness be the fault of the Christian member, he or she will proceed at once to remove the evil and, like Zacchæus, make restitution many fold—the more gladly and willingly because the injury in this case has been done to one who was the object of deepest personal love. But suppose the hearer of this teaching be the injured party? Shall he or she demand certain rights or declare all personal obligation at an end? Did Jesus ever allow such an attitude? No, he declared this to be the Christian's opportunity, that he should turn the other cheek, resist not the evil, love those who persecute and do wrong. If this be so in relations that are impersonal and distant, what is the case where the offender is the partner of one's life? Jesus once told Peter to forgive seventy times seven. He said in the Sermon on the Mount that, when impressed, we should carry the bundle a second mile. How many applicants for divorces have first tried such solutions? Paul was only echoing Jesus when he wrote that thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not, love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up . . . seeketh not its own, is not provoked . . . beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never fails." It is against the background of this teaching of forgiveness and the changing of evil into good that Jesus' teaching about divorce must be read.

The application of this teaching to our own day is, of course, full of the most difficult questions. It may well be, indeed it seems evident in many a case, that although wrong, a separation, whether temporary or made permanent by divorce, is the lesser of two evils. People do make shipwreck of their lives and there are conditions

under which it seems impossible for true home life ever to be recreated. But even here the underlying principle of Jesus' teaching remains. Such events are personal and social disasters. They should be the very last resort, and be entered only with sadness and a sense of shameful failure. That is the Christian view. Instead, we have grown into a state of mind where divorce is the normal or semi-normal experience. It is regarded with equanimity both by the parties themselves and by the general public. Without carrying Jesus' teaching to unwise extremes, are we not faced with the necessity of rediscovering his spiritual ideal of marriage? With so many marriages ending in the divorce courts, and the joy and gladness of weddings turning into the bitterness and acrimony of divorce proceedings, we need grievously to find again the more enduring basis of marriage that Jesus taught, that it is a sacred institution in which both participants merge themselves into a high and permanent union.

But our interest in the practical side of this question has made us overlook one of the greatest elements in these sayings on divorce. Ordinarily when we think of the rightfulness of divorce, we moderns pose the question in this form: "Has not an innocent woman the right to rid herself of a brute of a husband?" Now the interesting thing is that this alternative probably never occurred to Jesus' hearers. The only kind of divorce they knew anything about was the free divorce of wives by husbands. His words, therefore, rather meant to them such a championing of the cause of woman as they had not heard before. He challenged their whole man-made system of superiority, the unjust power of divorce which they wielded, the cruel inferiority and dependence which

were forced upon women. He declared that in marriage women had the same rights as men. "Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her" [28]—this was revolutionary. From the days of the Mosaic law, Jewish husbands had enjoyed that privilege. So amazing was it that in the account of this saying in Matthew we are told that the disciples replied, "If this is the case of a man with his wife then it is not expedient to marry"! [29] To their minds, marriage on such a basis was hardly conceivable, so rigidly does the custom of centuries set our minds. Jesus thus raised woman's place in the family to a point of absolute equality with that of man. In marriage there are equal obligations before God. There is a union in equality which goes back to the divine purpose in creation.

In this connection I can do no better than to quote from a very scholarly and widely read book written by one who would not call himself a Christian with the special desire to do justice to the religion of the Pharisees: "Jesus had occasion to meditate profoundly upon the treatment accorded to women in his age and by his people, and he expressed in word and deed convictions on this subject that are as important to-day as they were then. . . . His sympathy with women led him to condemn the Mosaic legislation in this matter, and to contrast its discrimination in favor of the man with the equality implied in the narrative of man's creation. At bottom it is an appeal from human legislation to the divinely ordained nature of man and woman. Such is the relation between man and woman as a result of creation and consequent

[28] Mark 10: 11. [29] Matthew 19: 10.

natural peculiarity of forming a unity by supplementing each other, that it cannot be right to allow a man to send away his wife in order to take another, and thus to leave a woman at the mercy of her husband's caprice. In so far Jesus . . . made himself one of the great champions of woman's cause." [80]

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

1. What was the Jewish attitude in Jesus' day toward (a) marriage, (b) children, (c) divorce, (d) the relative authority of husband and wife?
2. In what direct and indirect ways did Jesus emphasize the value of family life?
3. In what respects is the kingdom of God like a family?
4. Must devotion to one's family be the supreme ideal in life? Quote at least two sayings of Jesus on this subject.
5. Apply the principle of Question 4 to the problem of loyalty to one's country. To one's particular race.
6. Is divorce always wrong?
7. What is the Christian solution for domestic infelicity?

[80] Montefiore: *The Synoptic Gospels,* pp. 509, 510.

CHAPTER XI

THE REWARDS OF THE KINGDOM

I

THUS far we have been speaking of the kind of life that Jesus said should be lived by those who entered the kingdom of God. We have read much about duties and obligations, the demands he made on men, the renunciations which he declared were essential to becoming his disciple. But the primary impression that Jesus' teaching made on men was quite different—that he came preaching good news. And so true was this that the early Christians called his message by that very title, "The Good News," which by the curious accidents of language has been translated into English by the one word "gospel." So whenever we use the word gospel we bear testimony to the joyous character of the message that Jesus gave.

We saw in Chapters III and IV that this good news was summed up in the announcement that the long awaited "kingdom of God" was at hand. And this meant in the language and thought of the day that God was ready to give his richest blessings.

Scarcely can we realize what this announcement meant to those Jews who listened. Schooled for centuries to believe that God some day would pour out upon their nation supernatural blessings, they now heard a teacher of magnetic personality and remarkable power announcing that it was actually to happen shortly. What many prophets

and kings desired to see would come to pass in their day.[1] Their minds flew immediately to dreams of catastrophic happenings and miraculous transformations. They crowded around the teacher and awaited new miracles. They wanted signs and wonders. They could not believe that the richest divine blessings would not mean a magic realm far different from simple homely Palestine. So it is with us all. Our longings are for fairy lands from which the familiar obstacles and daily drudgeries are banished. It is hard for us to conceive God's richest blessings in a setting that is commonplace. Yet that is just what the teacher kept trying to tell them, that the kingdom which he announced would begin in the familiar scenes of Judea and Galilee, and that the great consummation was in the future. Many of them never understood, but carried their own impression even until after Jesus was killed by the leaders at Jerusalem. Some followed until they saw what he meant and then lost interest and went home.

But to return to the "good news." Jesus spoke much of the blessings which were ready for men. He described the life of the kingdom, urged men to enter into it, and then stressed the rewards which would be theirs. What they would lose would be far outweighed by the value of the rewards. The kingdom is "like unto a treasure hidden in a field; which a man found and hid; and in his joy goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field."[2] It is like the "pearl of great price," worth more than all else that the merchant possesses.[3]

[1] Luke 10: 24.
[2] Matthew 13: 44.
[3] Matthew 13: 46.

Note how frequently Jesus describes the members of the kingdom as "blessed." "Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [4] "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [5] "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." [6] When a woman praised him, he replied, "Nay, blessed are they who know the will of God, and do it." [7] We must not lose the force of that word "blessed." "Happy is that one," so Weymouth translates it. It is a word used in private letters of the day in expressions of warmest congratulation. Only as used in the Gospels there is added a definite religious idea—"happy in the enjoyment of the blessings of God."

This thought of the richness of the reward is not accidentally attached to Jesus' main thought, but is one of his primary conceptions. "Love your enemies, and do them good, lend, never despairing; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be sons of the Most High." [8] Better bodily dismemberment than miss the kingdom. "If thine eye cause thee to stumble, cast it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell." [9] The reward is sure. Even deeds done in secret will not be overlooked: "Thy father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee." [10] "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple,

[4] Matthew 5: 10.
[5] Matthew 5: 3.
[6] Matthew 5: 8.
[7] Luke 11: 28.
[8] Luke 6: 35.
[9] Mark 9: 47.
[10] Matthew 6: 4, 6.

verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." [11]

II

So outstanding is this whole thought of reward in Jesus' sayings that it has frequently been charged that Christianity is a doctrine of selfishness, that it bids us do good in order to get something. It is pointed out that certain pagan moralities, particularly Stoicism, insisted on duty for its own sake without thought of reward. In comparison the ethical teaching of Jesus is thus assigned a lower place.[12]

But we have seen that Jesus was the first to criticize this unlovely type of goodness when he saw it in men around him. A good act done from a selfish motive, whether it be public charity or prayer in the market place, brought his scathing criticism. The people who perform worthy deeds "to be seen of men" "have their reward," [13] but it is not the reward of the Father in heaven. The sayings in Luke 6:32-34 condemn specifically such selfish goodness: "If ye do good to them that do good to you, what thank have you? for even sinners do the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? . . . Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive again as much." Such sayings and many others preclude the idea that Jesus allowed his disciples to "do good hoping to receive." But we do not need such specific sayings. The whole tenor of Jesus' teaching on

[11] Matthew 10:42.

[12] For the treatment given this topic cf. Scott, *The Ethical Teaching of Jesus*, p. 63 f.

[13] Matthew 6:2, 5.

righteousness demands a devotion of the whole man to such a degree as to make impossible anything like a selfish morality.

What, then, is the point of all these sayings of reward? We seem to have a conflict. On the one hand, Jesus tells us that the motive of all action must be love of others and not thought of self; on the other hand, he holds up to us this thought of a great reward. The answer involves two or three principles.

In the first place, Jesus speaks of a reward from God, never from men. He turns the motive away from the approval of men to the approval of God. Notice, for example, how constantly in the Sermon on the Mount he enjoined his hearers to act, not for the approval of men, but of God, "who sees in secret."

And there is a vast difference between working for God's approval and seeking a reward from men. In the former case no outward show or pretense will suffice, but only the genuine devotion of the life. As Paul said later, "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor . . . but have not love, it profiteth me nothing."[14] God sees into the inner heart and motive. He sees things as they really are. Hence there is eliminated all the insincerity and duplicity that attends working for human reward. For one cannot lie to God, as Peter said to Ananias and Sapphira. To seek God's approval and his recompense means in the very nature of the case to love sincerely and to act honestly.

And with this understood, working for a reward simply means trusting God that altruistic service to our fellow-

[14] 1 Corinthians 13:3.

men will result in the highest and the best in life for ourselves. We give ourselves here in sincerely unselfish service and leave the personal result to God, confident that such a devotion of our energies and our thought will not lead to genuine loss. Jesus' teaching of reward from God is ultimately an assertion that goodness is not something alien in the midst of an evil universe, standing by itself, but that goodness lies at the heart of things; and an ordering of life according to its standards is highest wisdom for the individual as well as for society. It is no discredit to his teaching that it emphasizes this trust in God's care over his own.

But there is still a third factor in this teaching concerning reward. Jesus taught that we never really earn this reward from God. "All we like sheep have gone astray." Remember what was said in an earlier chapter on humility. The ideal of character is infinite, and before that standard no man can feel self-righteous or meritorious. "Were the eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them, think ye that they were sinners above all the men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." [15] No man deserves God's reward. We are like the workers in the vineyard who were hired at the eleventh hour. Of course they did not earn their pay. Why then did they receive it? Only because the master of that vineyard was ready to give the recompense whether earned or no. "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" says the master of the vineyard to his critics. "Is thine eye evil because I am good?" [16]

[15] Luke 13: 4 f. [16] Matthew 20: 15.

We must not think of ourselves as earning the divine blessings. The reward is out of proportion to our deserts. We might better say that God's blessings are free gifts flowing out of his love to those who set their hearts toward the kingdom and the obedience which it implies. God *gives* good things unto his children; they do not earn them—that is Jesus' thought. "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to *give* you the kingdom."[17] "Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not *receive* the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein."[18] The prodigal son finally resolved to return, hoping only to be made one of the hired servants, but the father in the story ran to greet him while yet afar off and ordered for him the most sumptuous entertainment.[19] In such sayings there comes out the thought that the blessings of the kingdom are really a divine gift to men and women who fall far short of earning or deserving them.

Thus while Jesus uses the word reward, and speaks of working for it, what he really does is to assure men that their trust in God and in God's way of life is not misplaced. God is a father who is waiting to give of his blessings in showering abundance, far in excess of what we deserve. From his teaching on the reward of goodness, the insincere motive is gone, the self-righteousness of the Pharisees is gone, and humility and gratitude and joy take their place. When one sees the character of God that Jesus revealed, the motive for doing good becomes devotion and love rather than a desire to earn a reward.

[17] Luke 12:32.
[18] Mark 10:15.
[19] Luke 15:21 f.

There is a vast difference between this and a selfish morality.

III

But what is the reward or blessing which God will give? Did Jesus promise material blessings? We referred above to the fact that many people have understood him so to speak. The passages, "Seek ye first his kingdom, and its righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you," [20] and the promise in Mark 10:29 of a hundredfold of all houses and lands given up for the cause, are quoted in support of the contention. Is material wealth the blessing that God waits eagerly to give?

We may dismiss this interpretation. Wealth is not always a blessing. Jesus himself insisted on its risk to the soul. "Keep yourselves from all covetousness." [21] "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." [22] "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." [23] "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom." [24] But apart from the moral risk of money, Jesus made it clear that it was not the greatest blessing. "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things that he possesseth." [25] "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world . . ." provided he miss something else? [26] Over against the "unrighteous mammon" there is a "true riches." [27] Even our own experiences in life, limited as they are, show us that riches are not final or satisfactory in themselves, but only of

[20] Matthew 6:33.
[21] Luke 12:15.
[22] Matthew 6:24.
[23] Matthew 6:19.
[24] Mark 10:25.
[25] Luke 12:15.
[26] Matthew 16:26.
[27] Luke 16:11.

value as serving toward other ends. The verses which are alleged to prove that Jesus taught a materialistic reward to those who obey God's will clearly have another meaning. And if one will take the trouble to read these carefully in their own setting, there will not be much difficulty in discovering their real import. Matthew 6:33, for example, as the preceding verses show, is certainly a promise of all necessary food and clothing rather than of the accumulation of wealth.

Similar to this suggestion is the view that the reward of the kingdom is immunity from all physical ills. I remember some years ago a very devoted Sunday school teacher who maintained most sincerely that a real Christian should have no fear of dangerous animals or bodily ills. He cited the verse in Luke 10:19, "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall in any wise hurt you." Paul's trials and afflictions ought to have been a sufficient refutation of the interpretation. But we need not go that far. Jesus himself, as we have seen, foretold persecutions and trials, even death to some. The sons of Zebedee were to drink of the same cup of which he was to drink. The shepherd was to be smitten and the sheep scattered. Peter's viewpoint, that such sufferings should not come to the Messiah, "mindest not the things of God, but the things of men." [28]

The Gospels show us that Jesus would have been the first to condemn a life of physical ease untouched by any trial and vitalized by no possible danger. That idea is below the elevation of his view of life. To him it was a

[28] Mark 8:33.

thing to be bravely hazarded and freely given. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." "Blessed are ye, when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad." [29] All the great ones of the past had been so treated. The mantle of prophecy involves persecutions.

IV

What, then, is the reward of fidelity to Christ, if it is not wealth and if it is not safety? For the clearest statement of our answer we must go to the Fourth Gospel. It is life itself. What else could be adequate? Jesus calls upon men to give up all for the sake of the kingdom, to make it the one dominating object of life. If riches conflict with that aim, we must, like the rich young man, give our wealth away. If love of family interferes, then it is necessary to disregard father and mother and brother and sister. If necessary, we must cut off the hand or pluck out the eye. It is all or nothing. Consecration of part of life is of no value. We must "lose our lives," as Jesus said. What reward can be commensurate with such a loss except the discovery of a better life? Just as in the sacrifice, so also in the recompense; no halfway measures will avail.

I said that John's Gospel gives the answer most clearly. Over and over Jesus is recorded as declaring that the reward of obeying his commands would be life. "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," [30] "And

[29] Matthew 5: 10-12. [30] John 10: 10.

ye will not come to me that ye may have life" [31]—many such passages occur in the Gospel of John. This same fundamental thought is also found in the Synoptic Gospels. It is in one of the great central passages of Jesus' sayings—Mark 8:35-37: "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it. . . . For what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life?" The reward of the kingdom is not something arbitrarily tacked on to experience, something valuable perhaps, but which one could do without. It is rather a reward which is to be found in the very center of life, enriching and blessing every phase of its activity. It is the gift of life in its truest sense. As Professor Scott has suggested, just as the reward for being a good citizen is not some purse or prize, but the enjoyment of the life of a citizen, so performing the duties of the kingdom finds its reward in the kind of life which the kingdom imparts.

And how, in Jesus' thought, does the service of the kingdom enable one really to find life? In what specific ways is experience made richer and finer? How are those who do the will of God deserving to be called blessed? There are a number of things which Jesus had to say here.

1. In the first place, he laid it down that this sort of life is everlasting. It leads to the kingdom in the heavens. "They shall receive houses and brethren . . . now in this time, and in the world to come eternal life." [32] "Great is your reward in heaven," is one of the refrains of the

[31] John 5:40. [32] Mark 10:30.

Sermon on the Mount. "Every one therefore who shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven." [33] "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven." [34] We must never forget this confident hope, else we are sure to get a distorted picture of our Lord's teaching. He did not teach merely an ethical system. What he had to say about duties here was uttered against the background of a life to come. Surely, then, it is the height of folly to store one's barns with corn and to think only of eating, drinking, and being merry, and to ignore the great future which looms ahead.

For the "sons of the kingdom" that future life is to be one of the most complete bliss. Several times he followed a precedent of the rabbis and spoke of it under the figure of a great banquet. "Verily I say unto you, I will no more drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." [35] By the figure he clearly meant that gladness and rejoicing would reign universally. He spoke of the association with the great figures of the past, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,[36] and of the angels who are the ministers of the kingdom.[37] But he never let himself be drawn into an attempt to describe the nature of that heavenly life. Amid all the nagging and baiting that surrounded him, Jesus never lost his saneness and balance. Why propound these puzzles as to the resurrection, whose wife will the woman with seven husbands be, and all the other questions that can be

[33] Matthew 10:32.
[34] Matthew 8:11.
[35] Mark 14:25.
[36] Matthew 8:11.
[37] Mark 12:25.

asked? For that life will be totally different from this earthly existence. "For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels in heaven." [38] The pictures of the banquet are only figures. The "great gulf" and all the rest of it are only spatial terms which we are compelled to use. It is a spiritual, not a material existence. The only kind of life we know anything about is this bodily one; what a life after death will be like we must leave in the hands of God.

How do we know there will be any such thing? That was the argument the Sadducees had been making for a hundred years. It is interesting to notice the answer that Jesus made to them. He quoted from the Old Testament a passage about the character of God.[39] And in essence that is the only argument he makes: the Scriptures show that God is of a certain character. And after all, is that not our simplest and most abiding ground for hope, the nature and character of God as Jesus described him? There are figures and there are analogies, but the only firm assurance is belief in a God of love who "will not leave us in the dust." At any rate, that is what Jesus answered to those who doubted in his day.

This emphasis on the other life has produced some of the world's greatest characters. It has released man from bondage to the present. It is only dangerous and otherworldly in a bad sense when men hold it to the exclusion of any interest in this present world, in which men must live and children grow. Jesus did not make that mistake. He declared that the service of the kingdom also increases

[38] Mark 12:25. [39] Mark 12:26, 27.

immeasurably the richness of the life that now is. How is this the case?

2. There is a many-sided answer to this question.

(i) I begin with what Jesus said about the material things of life. He did not promise wealth and prosperity, as we have seen, but he did quite boldly declare that one of the blessings of the kingdom will be the assurance of a heavenly Father's care. And he means this in quite material things. Just as God feeds the sparrows and clothes the lilies, so will he provide for us. In one beautiful figure after another this thought is presented in the sixth chapter of Matthew. "Behold the birds of the air." "Consider the lilies of the field." "And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his stature?" "But if God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." [40] That last phrase gives the secret. These things are necessary—at least as long as it is the will of God that we remain in the world at all—and God is ready to provide for our needs. Indeed, he thinks first of these needs of ours: "Your Father knoweth what ye have need of before ye ask him." [41]

And is this teaching of God's providence so hard to believe? Let us remember several things. First, we must not forget, as has been said, that Jesus is not promising wealth, the laying up of treasure. He has in mind only

[40] Matthew 6:25-32. [41] Matthew 6:8.

what is actually needed for life. The member of the kingdom has put other things above money. Furthermore, remember that such an individual will not be a parasite upon his fellow-men. The kingdom means service, not dependence on others. Jesus is certainly not inculcating a disposition that sits idly by and prays the Lord to provide while other men are at work doing the labor of the world. The law of love would never allow such an attitude. Then we must remember that this individual always has in mind in his labor the needs of humanity. His life's work serves others. Is it unreasonable to believe that such a life can be sure of enough to eat and drink? Possibly we can construct imaginary cases to the contrary, but for most Christians in this age the answer is quite evident. We assume it in all our daily thought. And if we ourselves are ready to admit the truth that Jesus spoke, let us cease regarding these sayings as the dream of an idealist.[42] Of course, as society becomes progressively dominated by the ideals of the kingdom, the truth of this assurance of a sufficiency for life becomes more obvious.

But it is interesting to notice in the same passage the use to which our Lord puts this confident trust. He seems interested not so much in the food and drink and clothing

[42] It might be asked, Is not the assurance of the necessities of life as great for the selfish individual as for one trying to serve the kingdom? The answer is quite certainly, No. Society has no need of the former. It can dispense with the work and with the presence of one who does not serve in any way. But only by ignorance will society ever fail to give to the latter its unwavering support and protection. Our whole wage system and salary system is *theoretically* based on this premise of proportionate reward to him who serves society most.

in themselves as in the effect of this trust upon the human spirit. "Be not anxious, be not anxious, be not anxious" —that is the refrain. He sees in this gift of God's care the liberation of mankind from the burden that he has been carrying through the ages. Thrift, prudence, industry, yes, by all means; but thrift and industry without the worries and fears that undermine our health and tear our spirits. We dream of a sense of security and slave feverishly at our tasks, hoping by the success of years to attain it. Jesus declared that this security was at hand if only we would realize it. It is to be obtained not by years of arduous toil, but by learning the simple lesson of the fatherhood of God. In perfect trust and confidence Jesus said that we should pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." [43] As members of the kingdom we can be sure of a Father who will "add these things" according to our need.

(ii) But this thought merges into that of a more general phase of the reward. The life of the kingdom removes all the anxiety and fear and worry which come to us because of our competition and strife with other men. Can we keep up in the race with the people around us? Will this issue turn out right? Is this decision we have made the right one? Will the important position come to us or to the other man? These and a hundred other problems are malignant spirits that will not leave us in peace. To the man or woman who has made the kingdom first in life, such attitudes and anxieties are impossible.

For Jesus' teaching cuts away the reins with which we

[43] Matthew 6: 11.

are being driven. If service becomes our motive and not rivalry, the race to outdo and surpass others is over, once and for all. The outlook on life is changed, the ends to be sought are different. The old yearning for wealth and power and mastery are removed. We work with and for, not against our fellow-men. Nor can such a spirit stand in fear of possible failure. In every situation and in every circumstance a loving spirit can find opportunity to serve. The aim of life has become one which neither accident nor evil can thwart. The haunting fear of ultimate failure can be laughed out of court, for the individual has set himself to contribute to the utmost of his power to the health, happiness, and good of those around him. The richness of such a life of ministering cannot be taken away.

This message of life's happiness to be found in a different direction from the one in which we ordinarily pursue it was never more needed than to-day. We let our lives be directed by arbitrary and external standards. We measure success by something accidental and uncertain. Success lies within life, not outside it. It consists in the wise and efficient use of the chance to work and to serve. To the man or woman who sees that clearly and puts it in practice there comes calmness and peace and freedom.

(iii) In the third place, the service of the kingdom of God brings peace with oneself. Our lives are all at cross purposes. We have desires which conflict and aims which are contradictory. We gratify part of our nature to the remorse and destruction of our other selves. Paul put it to himself in the familiar words, "The good which I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I

practice." [44] Quite apart from the specifically good and evil, we achieve little unity for our lives. We chase this rainbow and that will-of-the-wisp. Jesus called upon men to make a complete break with the old life and consecrate themselves, deed and thought, person and property, the present and the future, to the one ideal of the kingdom of God. He declared—though not in so many words—that only thus could any satisfactory unity of the inner life be achieved. To try to find a harmony of purposes in selfishness results in starving the soul of all that is finest; and to adopt any narrower limit of devotion than the full kingdom of God on earth soon entangles the individual in inevitable contradictions, hesitancies, compromises, conflicts. The complete devotion of the whole self to the kingdom of God is the only answer to the inner problem of life. Jesus called it "rest for your souls" in that beautiful passage, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . And ye shall find rest for your souls." [45] To the man who can make the decision and maintain it, the inner struggle is over. Henceforth he is devoted to the great, comprehensive aim of Jesus, an aim which finds its most immediate application to those closest about him, but which includes all mankind in its scope. The ultimate issues are decided. There is calmness in the depths. The problems that remain are those of method and application.

(iv) Then, next, there is the reward of perfect social relations. How much of the value of life comes from personal relations! There are, of course, satisfactions which are quite impersonal—food when hungry, a warm bed in

[44] Romans 7: 19. [45] Matthew 11: 28.

winter, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, the enjoyment of natural beauty. But when these things have been quite sufficiently recognized, how barren they tend to become without those personal values which our nature craves. Run over the interests and activities of the day and consider how empty life would become if human relations were taken out, how vital they are to the completion of the normal life of man. Membership in the kingdom of God means that there has taken place a right ordering of all personal relations. Hate, suspicion, and antagonism are eliminated. The circle of friendship is enlarged and deepened. The human ties that bind us to others are multiplied and made stronger. Life finds its purpose for others, the individual becomes, in the root meaning of the Latin word, altruistic. He lives for others and, as a result, bodily and mentally with others. The emphasis in life falls on personality and its values.

Hence, naturally, all values that flow into life from the right ordering of our relations to other individuals are multiplied like the seed which fell on the good ground. The elements which make one's family the most blessed thing on earth are extended indefinitely. Brotherhood assumed at the beginning as an obligation becomes by practice a treasure discovered anew each day. The generous attitude toward all is transformed into the warmth and wealth of human friendship. Love, the duty, finds its own reward.

That is what Jesus meant when he gave Peter that amazing answer. "Peter began to say, Lo, we have left all and followed thee. Jesus said, There is no man who hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands . . . but he shall receive an hundred-

fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions." [46] For such a man enters into the great family of humanity. Such a man, who loves his neighbor as himself, possesses in his heart of hearts many lands and many houses; lands which serve his deepest purposes of supporting the hungry of the world, houses that care for his brother's comfort and which lodge those whom he delights to serve. Such a man possesses the universe, because he has taken unto his heart the men and women and children who live therein.

(v) Lastly, Jesus spoke of a reward that transcends the relations of time and space. He spoke of fellowship with God.

Again and again in this little book we have seen how everything goes back to that thought. It is the foundation of all else that he said. The first commandment of all is to love God, to love him "with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy mind, and all thy strength." [47] "Blessed are the pure in heart," he said, because "they shall see God." [48] When the disciples returned from their first missionary journey, elated over their success, he pointed them to the real ground of rejoicing—not that they had power over demons, but "rejoice that your names are written in heaven." [49] In Jesus' mind this was the greatest and most inclusive good of life.

It is dangerous to attempt to elaborate this thought. There are three aspects, however, which are especially evident. In the first place, it is a fellowship of character

[46] Mark 10: 28-30.
[47] Mark 12: 30.
[48] Matthew 5: 8.
[49] Luke 10: 20.

and purpose. The thing that Jesus aimed at was that men should become Godlike in life. Recall the verses on forgiving your enemies: "that ye may become sons of your Father in heaven, for he makes the sun to rise upon the evil and the good." [50] Apart from such "becoming like him" all claims of fellowship with the divine, Jesus would have said, are self-deceptions. This is a sobering thought. There have been many kinds of mystics and many sorts of emotional experiences in the realm of religion. No sooner had the Christian Church begun than the problem arose of those who claimed to be prophets and to speak by special and personal revelation. Jesus supplied the standard for testing all such spirits and such experiences—the simple rule, "by their fruits ye shall know them."

Then notice that this likeness of character and purpose results in a lifting of the horizon of life. It means essentially that we are to look at the world and at our own lives from the divine viewpoint, to see them as God sees them. There is a new perspective in all things. No longer are things seen from the narrow horizon of our personally centered experience; but rather, if I may borrow the phrase of a great philosopher, *sub specie æternitatis,* "in the light of all eternity." Even one standing afar off can see the meaning and purpose thus infused into life. We enter into the purposes of God, the enriching and blessing of all life. We become fellow-workers in his creative plan. A sense of mission comes upon us. We are lifted out of the trivial routine and enter into the succession of the saints and pioneers of the faith.

[50] Matthew 5:45.

And third, an aspect which includes all others: this fellowship means a constant sense of the nearness of God. Every page of our Gospels shows how Jesus possessed that sense. It lies back of such sayings as "Consider the lilies of the field: your Father clothes them," "Behold the birds of the heavens, your Father feedeth them." It was his strength in hours like the cleansing of the Temple and the lonely vigil in Gethsemane. The individual who possesses that consciousness of God moves in a world where he is at home because it is a world that God has made; the grass is a carpet that he has spread and the sunshine and rain are his daily ministrations. And such an individual thinks and acts no longer in his own power alone. A Father's care and a Father's strength are constantly about him. And the companion of his thought is a moral perfection that transforms his selfishness and his weakness into loving courage.

Looking back over this chapter the question recurs, Is the kingdom of God the pearl of great price? Is it worth the renunciation of all else? Is the return more than what is given up? No one can answer that for another. Each man must find the ends and values of life for himself. But we can see now what is involved in the question. The issue is simply whether the ends of life are within personality and its relations to other individuals, or in something external to it. The reward of the kingdom as Jesus taught it is the enriching, broadening, and continuation of personal experience—"life, and that more abundantly." [51]

[51] John 10: 10.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. What is the meaning of the word "gospel"?
2. Is it necessarily wrong to do good for a reward? Wherein lies the moral danger of such a motive? How does the teaching of Jesus preclude this?
3. Recall Jesus' description of righteousness. How would a truly good or righteous man use wealth? Show how inconsistent Jesus' teaching would be if wealth were declared to be the reward of goodness.
4. If all members of society were dominated by the ideals of the kingdom of God, do you think that poverty would still exist? Give reasons for your answer.
5. What do you think is the meaning of the passage, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. . . . And ye shall find rest for your souls"?
6. What elements make Christmas the happiest season of the year? Does the life of the kingdom of God develop or weaken this element in life?

CHAPTER XII

JESUS AND THE KINGDOM

I

MANY of us have been accustomed to think of Jesus as suddenly appearing in Galilee after his years of preparation, announcing to the people that he was the expected Messiah, performing various miracles to prove the statement, and calling upon men to accept his claims and follow his commands. That seems to us the natural thing for him to have done. But it was not Jesus' method. He did go through the towns and villages with a great announcement, and he did stir the whole district with his wonderful deeds of healing. But the proclamation that he made was not about himself, nor were the miracles merely "signs" to convince an unbelieving people.

He began his work, according to Mark, in the following way: "After John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe in the good news."[1] Matthew says that the subject of this preaching was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."[2] Obviously there was much more than just these words, but they contain the subject of his preaching. It was about God and his rule.

[1] Mark 1: 14, 15. I have substituted the words "good news" for "gospel" at the end of the sentence. See Chapter XI.
[2] Matthew 4: 17.

Jesus placed before his hearers the challenge of the kingdom of God and would not let them divert him to other topics. By the seaside, on a mountain slope, in a house, sitting in a boat, at the synagogue service, he kept speaking of God and what was involved in his complete rule over life. He talked about the value of being in that divine "kingdom," the kind of life that it demanded, the danger of neglecting the invitation. And like his predecessor, John, he called on those who heard him to repent that they might not be left outside. Interruptions of all sorts occurred, from possessed people, from the religious leaders, from the civil authorities. Still he kept to his theme, teaching the multitudes about God and his way of righteousness.

If we turn to the sayings which the Gospels have preserved from this Galilean ministry, we may see for ourselves that this was the content of his message. Take the Sermon on the Mount as the clearest example. Here is a discourse, three chapters long in the first Gospel, which Matthew and Luke both give as an illustration of his teaching. It is all about the life of the kingdom. The people who are truly blessed, the right way to pray and fast and give alms, the loving care of God, the new righteousness compared with the old law, the folly of neglecting God's message—these are the subjects he talks about. As we read these sayings one after another—pearls on a string, they have been called—we can see how Jesus was holding up to his hearers the picture of a new life, showing now one side of it, now another, enticing, persuading, warning. But there is nothing about himself, his title, his authority, except at the close where he emphatically

rejects one who might hail him personally as Lord, but "does not the will of my Father in heaven." [3]

Mark does not have much teaching material, especially in the first half of his Gospel. Aside from special sayings on particular occasions, there are in the first half of his Gospel only three sections of discourse, all short: the series of parables on the kingdom,[4] the charge to the disciples departing for their first missionary effort,[5] and the sayings about what makes one clean or unclean.[6] In all of these there is that same absence of sayings about himself and his own place in the divine plan. He constantly talked about God and his perfect rule, and he quietly lived according to it.

There were individuals who caught glimpses of a deeper significance in his person than he expressly asserted. There was a sick man once who cried out suddenly in the synagogue, "Thou Jesus of Nazareth! I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God." [7] But Jesus rebuked him and said, "Hold thy peace." At the close of that Sabbath day in Capernaum when he healed many sick at the door of Peter's house, there were evidently a number of such cases. "He cast out many devils," says the Evangelist, "and he suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him." [8] Later we read that certain other unclean spirits cried out at him, "Thou art the Son of God," and that "he charged them much that they should not make him known." [9] When at Cæsarea Philippi the disciples themselves finally reached their great

[3] Matthew 7:21.
[4] Mark 4.
[5] Mark 6:7-11.
[6] Mark 7.
[7] Mark 1:24.
[8] Mark 1:34.
[9] Mark 3:12.

confession, we are expressly told again that Jesus "charged them that they should tell no man of him."[10] Instead of making an open claim to his unique authority and position he seems rather to have restrained those who would make such claims on his behalf.

The multitude took him for a prophet, one of the great ones of Israel. After witnessing the raising of the son of the widow of Nain, "they glorified God, saying, A great prophet is risen among us."[11] The disciples told Jesus that men thought of him as "John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets."[12] Even at the close of his work when he made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and when all the city was stirred, wondering who he might be, we are told that "the multitudes said, This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."[13] So again the scribes and Pharisees, though they wished to destroy him, "feared the multitudes, because they took him for a prophet."[14] We even find that he acquiesced in the title, using it occasionally of himself. "A prophet is not without honor save in his own country,"[15] he declared of himself. And he said to the friendly Pharisees who informed him of Herod's intention to kill him, "I must go on my way to-day and to-morrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet perish outside of Jerusalem."[16] Thus according to the Synoptic Gospels Jesus said nothing himself as to his Messiahship, restrained others who wished to make it public, and ac-

[10] Mark 8:30.
[11] Luke 7:16.
[12] Mark 8:28.
[13] Matthew 21:11.
[14] Matthew 21:46.
[15] Mark 6:4.
[16] Luke 13:33.

cepted without question or qualification the title of one of Israel's prophets.

II

These facts are enough to show that Jesus did not go about Galilee announcing his Messiahship and asking men to believe him. He intentionally subordinates all such personal definitions and appraisals to the message of God's kingdom. This need not disturb us. It is easy to see what he had in mind. To have announced that the Messiah, expected for centuries, had at last appeared would have thrown the nation into an uproar of excitement and misunderstanding. For there were various views in the Palestine of our Lord's day as to the nature and task of the Messiah, and each man would interpret the news according to his own presuppositions and desires. To some it would mean a war of political liberation. Certainly the Roman authorities would interpret the announcement in this way and act accordingly. Disturbance on the one hand and incredulity on the other would attend him wherever he went. And this tumult and excitement would make impossible his primary object, to bring Israel to rethink God and his relation to their lives. The attention of the multitudes would be irretrievably diverted from that new picture of life and that fresh revelation of God which he set himself to give.

There is a story in Mark—it is the sequel to the healing of the people at Peter's door referred to above—which gives a clear indication of this attitude of Jesus. Early the next morning, before anyone else was about, Jesus slipped out of the town and departed into a desert place. "And Simon and those with him followed after him; and

they found him, and say unto him, All are seeking thee. And he saith unto them, Let us go elsewhere into the next towns, that I may preach there also; for to this end came I forth."[17] From the excitement and notoriety he fled away. In the face of such a situation he could not bring about that repentance of the heart which he sought. This would be accomplished by instruction, exhortation, and example, not by gathering together great crowds curious to see some marvelous work.

But there was a deeper reason than this certainty of excitement and confusion which lay back of Jesus' refusal to speak of his own position and authority. He preferred that men might see his work and learn from it how to regard him. It was easy to claim to be the Anointed One. Many impostors had already done that, men like the wandering Egyptian mentioned in Acts 21:38 who, according to Josephus, led thirty thousand people out to the Mount of Olives to witness the fall of Jerusalem. Such men came through the country gathering the credulous and gullible to their banner. Jesus cared for no such following. He did not ask that men should confess any faith in him apart from a knowledge of what he taught and the ideals for which he stood. "By their fruits ye shall know them,"[18] he declared many times to his own disciples, and he did not ask men to suspend this test in his own case. He asked for disciples who would believe in him and his mission on the basis of a realization of his meaning for Israel rather than on any personal claim that he might make.

Note the way in which Jesus called men to discipleship.

[17] Mark 1:36 f.

[18] Matthew 7:16 and elsewhere.

He did not begin by demanding that they should believe something about him, but that they should believe in him and in the message that he spoke. "Come after me," he said to Simon and Andrew, "and I will make you to become fishers of men." [19] That was a call for coöperation with him in the task. He passed by the tollhouse where sat Matthew, the publican, taking in the customs, and said to him only, "Follow me." [20] And Matthew rose and followed him because his heart responded to the opportunity of allegiance to such a cause and such a leader. To the rich young man who came running to him he commanded that he sell all that he had, give it to the poor, and come and join him in his work.[21] He called another who asked if he might first return and bury his father. "Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but go thou and publish abroad the kingdom of God," was the reply he gave.[22] In all these cases we observe that Jesus makes the work of the kingdom the basis for fellowship with and recognition of himself.

Then consider the way in which he dealt with the Twelve. He called them, Mark says, "that they might be with him." [23] They were men of spiritual appreciation and promise. They were eager for the coming of the kingdom and went out on Jesus' command to proclaim it through the cities of Israel. And yet it is quite evident, from the account of the great confession at Cæsarea Philippi, that during all this earlier period they had not yet come to the realization that he, their leader, was the

[19] Mark 1: 17.
[20] Matthew 9: 9.
[21] Mark 10: 17 f.
[22] Luke 9: 60.
[23] Mark 3: 14.

Messiah. Nor had he ever told them. It was Peter who made the great confession, and Jesus' reply to him was, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." [24] He called these specially chosen ones that they might be with him and come to know him, and he left their decision concerning him to flow from that experience.

But there is an even clearer illustration still. The growing reputation of Jesus reached John as he lay in prison. He sent two of his disciples with directions to ask the specific question, "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" [25] The reply which Jesus makes to so direct a question from the man whom he called the expected Elijah is very significant. "Go your way and tell John the things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall find none occasion of stumbling in me." What does he mean? Simply that John must make the blessing of mankind which Jesus was accomplishing the basis of any decision concerning him. He makes no demand, he utters no claim, he tells of no inner experience; But blessed is the man with the eyes to see. Jesus never forced his Messiahship upon anyone, but let it grow inevitably, irresistibly out of knowledge of himself and his work.

[24] Matthew 16: 17.
[25] Matthew 11: 3 f. and Luke 7: 19 f.

III

But Jesus is inseparably bound up with those principles and ideals which he taught and by which he lived. He did not speak of something abstract, a theory or a philosophy, but of a practical way of living. And he personified that way of life, was both its evangel and its example. Hence the attitude that men took toward the kingdom was most clearly and most quickly revealed by the attitude which they displayed toward him. He summed up and expressed that new life of which he spoke, in his teaching of men, in the good that he went about doing, in his strong and universal love, in his opposition to certain institutions and practices. And men showed even in spite of themselves their attitude toward that kind of life by the response which they made to Jesus. As John's Gospel put it, "This is judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light." [26]

This fact Jesus fully recognized and makes clear in all his ministry. It is involved of course in his imperative command that men should leave their fishing nets, their tollgates, even the obsequies of deceased parents, and should accept his leadership and example. "Blessed is he who shall find no occasion of stumbling in me," he said to the messengers of John the Baptist. "Whosoever shall lose his life *for my sake* and the gospel's shall find it." [27] "Verily there is no man who hath left house or brethren or sisters or mother or father or children or

[26] John 3:19.

[27] Mark 8:35; Matthew 10:39; Matthew 16:25, and Luke 9:24 (with minor variations in the wording of the second phrase).

lands *for my sake* and the gospel's . . ." but will receive a hundredfold reward. "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, *for my sake.* Rejoice, and be exceeding glad." [28] These examples taken at random from his sayings show that Jesus did not hesitate for one moment to demand loyalty to himself. He was fully conscious of his mission as founder and representative of God's kingdom, and he called unto himself the allegiance and devotion of those who would enter therein.

Some of the disciples understood this to involve personal ministry and service to him as an individual. It was natural that they should want to give it, and Jesus appreciated the love that prompted such acts. Witness his consideration of and thanks to the woman who came into the house and bathed his feet with the precious ointment. But this was not the kind of service that he demanded of men. 'The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." [29] There is a most interesting story which Luke preserves of a journey through Samaria. Evening coming on, "he sent messengers before his face; and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they would not receive him, because his face was as though he were going to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?" [30] But the inhospitality of these Samaritans had no reference to the work that Jesus was accomplishing or the spirit

[28] Matthew 5:11, 12.
[29] Mark 10:45.
[30] Luke 9:52.

he represented. To them he was merely a Jew traveling through their country, very likely against his own desire. They had never heard of him before and never expected to see him again. In such cases Jesus demanded no more consideration for himself than for other individuals. "He turned," goes on the narrative with vivid brevity, "and rebuked them. And they went unto another village." The loyalty that he demanded was to himself as the representative of the kingdom and was to be expressed in obedience to implications of that great ideal. He asked neither that men should apply to him some set title or description, nor that they render physical service to his person. He required only that they should meet the moral challenge of his life and work.

This is the thought that lies behind Jesus' reply to John on another occasion when that disciple demonstrated his partisan spirit. The story this time is told by Mark. "John said unto him, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name: and we forbade him, because he followed not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a mighty work in my name, and be able quickly to speak evil of me." [31] It was enough for Jesus that the man was doing the work of the kingdom.

But perhaps the most striking of all the sayings or incidents which express this attitude is the oft-quoted (though not always happily quoted) verse about the sin against the Holy Spirit. This occurs in Jesus' reply to the charge of the Pharisees that by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of devils, he performed his marvelous

[31] Mark 9: 38, 39.

works, and in particular his cure of a possessed person. A more malignant charge cannot be imagined. In his reply Jesus distinguished between insults that were purely personal and those which attacked through him the goodness and love that he represented. To take such obvious blessings as had been witnessed in this case and describe them as works of the devil evidenced an intentional malice that could not take for granted God's readiness to forgive. "Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak a word against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him." [32] Thus he made sharp distinction between himself as an individual and as the agent or representative of the spiritual forces of God.

As leader of the cause of the kingdom Jesus demanded personal loyalty and obedience. When the Jews asked him for his authority, he asked whence was the authority of John, whose inexorable moral demands and stern message of judgment had shaken the conscience of the nation. Was it from men or from heaven? [33] His own authority was from the same source, only more complete in proportion to the greater significance of that which he was accomplishing.

IV

If it be asked, What was the thing of such permanent significance that he regarded himself as doing? it will be answered, The establishment of God's kingdom on earth. In many ways he was conscious of accomplishing this. In the first place, we find that he claimed

[32] Matthew 12: 32. [33] Mark 11: 30.

to teach men the true way of righteousness, the kind of life that pleases God. "Everyone therefore which heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who founded his house upon a rock. . . . And everyone who heareth these words, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand." [34] "Whosoever shall break one of the least of these commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." [35] "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words . . . of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father." [36] Thus he claimed to reveal a final ethic of life, and he called men to seek salvation by obedience to his commands.

In the second place, his teaching shows that he was conscious of giving a fresh vision of God and his character. The Christian world has always turned to Jesus for its knowledge of God. He lived so constantly in the presence of God, he saw so clearly his love and his care, that he spoke with an authority that never wavered. His parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son, his sayings on the necessity of moral character for God's approval, his picture of the divine care even of the sparrow and the grass, have become the permanent treasures of the race. The very fact of such teaching implies a consciousness on Jesus' part that his primary task was to reveal God. But beyond all implication or inference

[34] Matthew 7:24.
[35] Matthew 5:19.
[36] Mark 8:38.

are several sayings, the most important of which is the one in Matthew 11:27 and Luke 10:21: "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth anyone know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." He was founding the kingdom by making Israel see anew the God whose will was its law.

Then again he saw the kingdom coming in the effectiveness of his own work. We have quoted earlier the saying, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then has the kingdom of God come upon you." That saying referred to the striking way in which his ministry was removing the physical ills which afflicted men and women. More important than this was the change in the inner lives of men and women who came in contact with him. He saw them renouncing their selfishness and taking upon themselves, or rather, within themselves, the rule of God. Zacchæus, who renounced his extortion, the woman to whom much was forgiven because she loved much, Peter and Andrew, who left their nets—these are only glimpses that we get of the moral transformation that went on around him. Many times he had occasion to say, as to the scribe of Mark 12:32, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

To some, however, it might appear that instead of establishing the kingdom he ended his life in humiliation and defeat. Judas thought this of it as he saw drawing ever nearer the high cross and the mocking soldiers. The eleven others saw in the impending event only a ghastly execution and the deathblow to all their hopes. But Jesus said to them that even this death was part of his contri-

bution to God's perfect rule on earth. In symbolism that they never forgot he declared that his body would be broken for them and his blood shed on their behalf.[37] Since it was not the will of his Father that this cup pass by, the Son of Man would gladly "give his life as a ransom for many." [38] Behind that Roman execution, in God's providence, he saw the coming of the kingdom. And every cross which Christian devotion has lifted since, whether on lofty cathedral or on rude walls amid savage tribes, bears testimony to the fact that he was not deceived. On the hill called Golgotha, outside the city walls, he carried his mission to its conclusion and its culmination.

In all this he was conscious of establishing the kingdom. And as those peasants and fisherfolk followed with him they too became conscious of it. Thus they acclaimed him Messiah, "The Anointed One," who would bring God's rule. Loyalty to the ideal and faith in it were identical with loyalty and devotion to himself.

He was the founder of the kingdom. He was its realization and embodiment as well. That which his teaching describes and illustrates in the abstract, his life presents in the person. He and the cause are inseparable. It was true then, it is true now. No man can be devoted to the brotherhood of man and hate Jesus. No man can admire service and despise Jesus. One cannot accept his teaching and reject him. Only ignorance of his real character and personality can ever make possible a separation. He will ever be the leader of the cause, he will always be at the head of the column. So long as love shall be the ideal of life, so long will Jesus be the leader of our souls.

[37] Mark 14: 22-24. [38] Mark 10: 45.

For religion is a personal thing. It can never become an abstract principle. It is a way of living. But this is something that cannot be read in a book or understood by disputation and discussion. Jesus chose his disciples that they might be with him, and that has been the Christian secret ever since. Drop out the person of Jesus from the gospel, and it becomes an ethical system, convincing perhaps in its wisdom and insight, but not impelling. Jesus talked about a new character, life lived in ordinary surroundings from a new center. In himself we see what such life actually means, because we see what it involves in our kind of world. It will always be true that the words of Jesus are most valuable as showing the kind of heart and soul from which they sprang. We, like early disciples, strive always behind the deed or the word to apprehend that life of Jesus which was his greatest gift to the world.

Thus far are we led in our study. But this is not the end of the story. The Synoptic Gospels give us the facts of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. They were written first—a vivid, compelling story poured out by enthusiastic souls who at the time were converting the centers of the Roman Empire. But there was much meaning in their story that only time and reflection would bring out. The significance of much that Jesus said had not yet been grasped, and a full expression of what he meant to the world was yet to be stated. At the close of the century, when Jerusalem had been destroyed for nearly a generation and the gospel was entering in earnest its conquest of the Greek and Roman world, John wrote his Gospel. It is not merely another account, additional and supplementary to the

Synoptic Gospels. It is rather the completion and interpretation of the message which these Gospels give. Thus our study leads us—as every study of the life and teaching of Jesus must lead—to the Fourth Gospel. But to this study another volume in this series of books will be devoted.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REVIEW

1. Why did Jesus during his Galilean ministry prefer not to announce his Messiahship to the public? Do you think Peter's confession means more when read in this light?
2. Did Jesus demand the personal allegiance of his hearers? Support your answer by several quotations. How was this allegiance to be shown?
3. Interpret the passage, "John said unto him, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followed not us. Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man that shall do a mighty work in my name, and be able quickly to speak evil of me." (Mark 9:38.) How would you apply this to modern conditions?
4. State the three different means given in the text by which Jesus was establishing the kingdom. Are these really separate activities or do they all merge into one another?
5. How did the disciples regard the approaching crucifixion? What was Jesus' teaching concerning it?
6. Can one be a Christian without loyalty and devotion to Jesus? Can one be devoted to Jesus and his objectives and not be a Christian?
7. What are the primary topics treated by the Fourth Gospel? (See John 3:16 for suggestions.)

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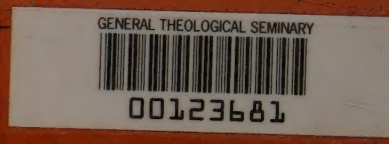

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